

JANUARY 1952

AND

IMAGINATION

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STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

VOL. 3 NO. 1
ISSUE NO. 8



Introducing the

AUTHOR



• PHOTO BY VICTOR BARNABA

★
Kris Neville
★

I was born in Carthage, Missouri. I'm rather proud of the town.

If you stand in the cupola of the courthouse you stand on the highest point in Jasper County, and I've heard it said you can see three states from there. The biggest battle in the Civil War before Bull Run was fought in the vicinity, and in 1865 so thoroughly had the war decimated the citizens nothing moved in the streets but an occasional deer.

I was born in 1925. By that time civilization had pushed the deer back into the upstate forests. A few years later - - this is one of my first memories - - the city built a swimming pool in Central Park. I went over to watch the construction, and one of the workmen gave me two lumps of the concrete. One was black and one was red. I remember being

very excited about the gift. Not everyone, I realized, had samples of the Carthage swimming pool for his very own. . . .

When I was six or so I went with my father to Center Creek to catch a few soft-shelled crawfish for bass bait. We arrived around midnight and ignited the carbide light. In hot pursuit of soft-shells we innocently trespassed upon private property within fifteen minutes. And shortly we spotted a tall, thin female hurrying through the darkness toward us. She wore a breeze whipped white nightgown and carried an old fashion lantern. When she drew close enough, she asked politely, "Have you gentlemen lost something in my brook?"

It's really surprising how writing
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The ditorial



DID you ever get the feeling when you finish a job that for once you've done a particularly nice piece of work? Well, as we look over the current issue just prior to writing this editorial we have that feeling. It even goes a little further; we think this is the finest issue of Madge you've had yet.

WE'VE been pleased with the past issues, in one degree or another, but this month the entire book sort of clicks into a pattern of all-around excellence. We're not simply blowing our editorial horn; you'll draw your own conclusions after you finish reading the stories and various departments and features.

THIS month's cover for example, is a "first" by talented artist, Bill Terry. When Bill asked us for an assignment to do a cover we obliged by giving him Kris Neville's novel to illustrate. We admit that we had our fingers crossed, wondering if Bill could really turn in a top notch cover with his first try. One look and our doubts vanished. The cover is not only good from an artistic standpoint, but Terry managed to inject something new into it: utilizing the story title as an integral part of the cover itself. This, in a sense answers the requests from many of you readers to eliminate boxes and extraneous type from the cover. Here you have a terrific science fiction painting with the lead story title as part of the scene. It im-

pressed us, and we think you'll like it too.

WE won't bother to comment on the stories in this issue except to say that every one of them is a darn good yarn, with plenty of suspense, human interest, and sustained action. You'll find the usual balanced variety of straight science fiction, straight fantasy, combined science-fantasy, and moods running from serious to light humor. There's one story, the short by John W. Jakes, that packs as dramatic a punch-line as we've ever read. We insist that you do not read the last page before you come to it. If this story isn't anthologized we'll be very much surprised.

SO all in all we're very happy about the lineup this issue. And we'd like to hear from you after you finish the issue. Which incidentally brings us to a point concerning the Reader's Page. We try and print as many letters as space will allow, and of course we have to operate on a deadline. So if you haven't had your chance in the letter section as yet it's because you've been getting your letter in late. We suggest you write as soon as you finish the issue because we go to press with the next issue two weeks after the current issue hits the stands. This means simply that we have to use letters that get here early.

SPEAKING of letters, Madge is sure reaching round the world.

In this issue you'll find letters from readers in South America, England, South Africa, Europe, and Canada. This makes us pretty happy because it shows that Madge's popularity is extending all over the globe. (We've even got a letter disguised as a story pertaining to the planet Mars!)

WE'D also like to call your attention to the announcement on page 162. It's self-explanatory, but we would like to state here that we hope all of you readers will take advantage of this special subscription offer. It probably won't be repeated again and it certainly will be worth your while to take advantage of it now while you have the chance. You know you can count on good entertainment in every issue of Madge, so why not send in your subscription today. You're getting a real bargain!

WE understand the World Science Fiction Convention in New Orleans was a huge success over the Labor Day holidays. Unfortunately we were not able to attend the festivities but we sure wish we could have been there. Perhaps the biggest thing to come out of the Convention was the selection of the next city for 1952. We're more than happy, and proud, to tell you that the '52 Convention will be held in Chicago.

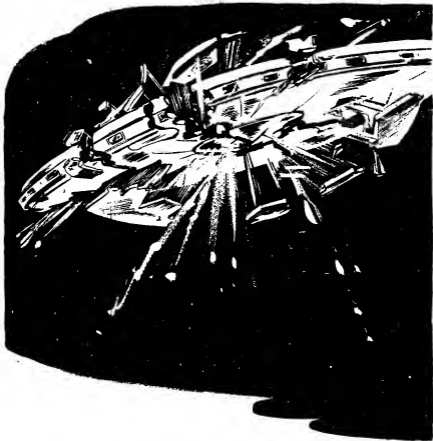
NATURALLY we're going to do everything we can to help make the Convention the biggest and most successful one ever held. While Madge's home is Evanston, we're still part of greater Chicago, and this goes for that other swell science fiction magazine, **OTHER WORLDS**, edited by Ray Palmer. Ray will be working just as hard as we will to see that you get all the

details released by the Convention Committee. That committee is even now being formulated and it will include the top fans in the Mid-West. Some of the Officers of the committee that we know of right now include Mark Reinsberg, Erle Korshak (publisher of SHASTA books) Ted Dikty, Oliver Saari, Judy May and Bea Mahaffey (managing editor of OW) along with, we understand, your own editor: Some of you oldtime fans will remember the Chicon of 1940 at which Mark Reinsberg and Erle Korshak presided. You know the swell job they did with the first Chicago convention, so with them on the committee for '52 you know you'll have a wonderful and colorful program awaiting you. As we get along into the year each issue of Madge will keep you up to date.

(Concluded on page 67)



"Dianetics? Hell no, Hadacol!"

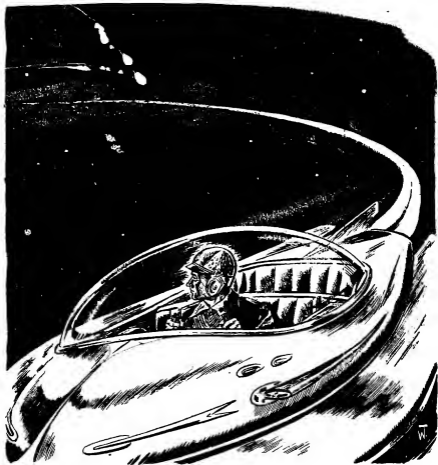


**Parr came to Earth as the advance guard
for an invasion. His mission: to see that every
person received a package that was being mailed—**

SPECIAL DELIVERY

By

Kris Neville



CHAPTER I

A CANNONADE of shell fire met the silver listening post as it zipped across the moonlit desert. It twisted erratically, trying to dodge. Then a radar controlled gun chuckled to itself, and the listening post faltered in flight, slipped air,

plunged sandward.

In the Advanceship, far above and to the west, one of the Knougs pressed a button and the listening post exploded in a white flare.

Afterwards, no fragments could be found. The newspapers said the usual thing. The government issued the usual profession of disbelief — and

finally even the gunner became convinced of the usual explanation: he had tried to pot Venus.

While on the Advanceship the Knougs continued to prepare for D-Day.

CHAPTER II

THREE days later, on D-Day minus thirty, the Advanceship began to move eastward, seeding down advancemen toward strategic centers in North America:

Towns with big post offices.

And then on over the Atlantic toward other continents.

Parr was the first advanceman to land. The coat tails of his conservative double breasted suit fluttered gently as he fell; air, streaming by, fretted his hair. Except for the anti-grav pack strapped to his back, he could easily have been mistaken in a more probable setting for an Earthman.

Minutes later his feet touched the ground with scarcely a jolt. He peeled out of the anti-grav pack, pushed the button on its disintegrator time fuse and dropped the pack. He lit a cigar and blew smoke toward the cold bright stars.

He walked from the weedy lot to the nearest bus stop. No one else was waiting. Darkness had concealed his descent. He sat down, stared stolidly at the darkened filling station on the opposite corner.

When he was halfway through the cigar the Los Angeles Red Bus came

by and he stood up, boarded it, fumbled in his pocket for change.

"Thirty cents, buddy," the driver said.

Still holding the cigar, Parr counted out two dimes and two nickles. He tried to hand the driver the coins, which were excellent imitations, as was his suit, his cigar, and all the rest of the Earth articles.

"Put it in the box, buddy."

Parr obeyed.

"Hey," the driver said as Parr turned. "Your check." The driver held out a strip of red paper.

Parr took it.

"No smokin' on the bus, buddy."

Parr dropped the cigar and mashed it out. He shuffled down the aisle, sank into a seat and half closed his eyes.

Furtively, then, he began to study the occupants — his first near-at-hand contact with the natives. At the same time he tried to form a mental liaison with some of the other advancemen.

For a moment he thought he had one to the east, but there was a hazy swirl of interdiction that erased all contact.

ABANDONING further attempts he tried to search out the frequencies of the minds about him. Once he managed to touch a series of thoughts innocently concerned with household details and with an overtone of mild and nameless anxiety. Aside from that he received nothing except the din of electronic im-

pressions at the extreme lower end of his range.

He half-turned to stare out of the window. The passing landscape was peaceful in starshine and the buildings stood proudly defenseless. In imagination he saw the illuminated, "You'll : take -a -shine - to - this - fine - wine" sign hanging askew over a backdrop of smoking rubble. And it was delicious to know that this would be fit and proper.

Although the preliminary intelligence report (based on nearly four years of preparatory scouting) contained no instance of Oholo activity on the planet, he listened, high up, on their frequencies, (particularly here, vulnerably near their own system it would be no fun fighting them.) He let his shoulders slump with relief, let the smile of satisfaction come. As reported, the frequencies were clear: Earth was, indeed, their blind flank.

He closed his eyes, relaxed completely, took quite a joy in the knowledge that shortly Earth would be the lethal dagger pointed at the heart of the Oholo system.

At the Beverly Hills transfer-for-Hollywood - the - film - capital - of - the - world Station, two drunks boarded the bus and settled in the rear, singing mournfully.

Parr grew increasingly irritated by the delay. When the bus finally started, making the sharp turn from the lot and throwing his body to the right against the steel ledge of the window, he cursed under his breath.

The dismal singing went on. It picked up telepathic overtones, and Parr gritted his teeth trying to block out the bubbling confusion that scattered from the drunken brain. He opened and closed his fists. Anger flared at him: the anger of impotence. For a moment, he dared to imagine the planet contaminated, the population quietly dead, the Knougs working from sheath hangers. Only for a second; but the brief thought was satisfying, even as he forced himself to agree with the strategy of the War Committee: which was to leave the planet as nearly unpoisoned as possible by even a minor land war.

Finally the song bubbled to silence. Half an hour later the bus turned on Olive Street and the gloomy Los Angeles buildings hovered at the sidewalks. It pulled in at the Olive Street entrance of the Hill Street Terminal and Parr got out.

He walked out of the lot and started downhill toward the Biltmore Hotel.

WHEN Parr awoke he knew that something had been added to Los Angeles during the night. He shivered involuntarily and tightened his thoughts down to the place where no fuzzy, side harmonics were possible.

He was afraid—the startled afraidness of finding something deadly underfoot. Gradually he made his body relax; gradually he quieted his twin hearts; gradually he corralled his

breathing. Then he let out a wisp of thought as tenuous as mist.

And he sensed the Oholo's mind again. Very near to his own. He closed his mind quickly, waited breathlessly to see if the Oholo had detected him. His ears hummed with danger for he was within mental assault range.

There was no answering probe and after a moment he got up cautiously.

Feeling the rug beneath his bare feet made him wince with a blind associational terror which he could not immediately analyze. Then, looking down, he thought of the tickle of Tarro fur. He half expected to see the dark stains on the rug too. Always, on Tarro fur—remembering—there were those stains. They had been a difficult people to rule. As *agent provocateur*, (that had been several years ago on Quelta) he had reason to expect blood.

He crossed to the trousers neatly folded over a chair. In the left front pocket was the comset. He fumbled it out and standing naked in the gloomy dawn, whispered: "Parr. There is an Oholo in my hotel."

After a pause the comset issued the tinny question: "Is he aware of you?" The voice filtering through the small diaphragm was without personality.

"I don't think so."

There was silence. Then: "Is he open?"

"I think . . . he is, yes."

"Find out for sure!"

The comset was cold in Parr's

hand. He stood shivering. He rubbed his left hand over his naked flank.

HE tried to kill his thoughts against the command from the Advancship, tried to let the drilled in obedience take over. He opened the receptive portion of his mind as far as it would go, knowing that within seconds seepage would be as loud as thunder because he was not adept at double concentration. But even before one second had gone he snapped his mind closed again.

The Oholo was open.

"Parr," he whispered hoarsely into the comset. "He's open."

" . . . He can't know we're here, then. What did you learn?"

Parr mopped his forehead with the back of his hairy arm. "I just kept receptive a second."

"Keep checking, then." •

Parr let the comset fall to the chair. He walked to the window and looked out at the haze bound city. Early sunlight fought blue smog. Across the street the Pershing Square pigeons waddled self-consciously about on the grass beside the new fountain, picking at invisible tidbits and cooing.

Parr rubbed his throat trying to massage away the inner tenseness. He was alone against the Oholo. An aloneness that he had not been prepared for. And he worried at the fear that was inside him.

He dressed with awkward fingers and left the room, his eyes darting suspiciously along the corridor as he

drew the door closed behind him.

He walked quickly down the carpeted stairs and through the front doors of the hotel. Several times he glanced over his shoulder as he hurried toward Sixth Street.

After four blocks he was sure that he had not been followed. He entered a restaurant. He ordered, reading from the menu.

He did not enjoy the meal.

AFTER eating he took a cab to the office of R. O. "Bob" Lucas, Realtor. The Advancement had determined that Lucas was the agent for an empty warehouse on Flower Street.

Parr exposed a bulky wallet for Lucas' benefit and began to rustle bills with blunt, stubby fingers. Within minutes he had signed a six month lease.

After making an appointment for three o'clock Tuesday at the warehouse, Parr left Lucas' office and caught a cab to a typewriter shop. He purchased a Smith-Corona portable, a ream of corrasable paper, a disk eraser, and five hundred business envelopes. At the bookstore next door, he bought a United States Atlas.

After that he took a cab to the post office, had the driver wait while he rented six postal boxes under the name A. Parr and bought twenty sheets of air mail stamps.

In the cab once more, he concentrated on the city map that had been impressed electronically on his brain.

"Drive out Sixth Street," he ordered, being very careful of his enunciation.

A half dozen blocks out Sixth, Parr located a hotel on the right side of the street. It was a reasonably safe distance from the Biltmore. He ordered the driver to stop.

The building sat atop a hill, the street before it twining briskly toward the center of town. Parr studied the building for a moment, memorizing details of architecture for reference.

Then settled with his purchases in a front room on the 3rd floor, Parr opened the Atlas to the Western United States and marked out the territory assigned to him with the heavy ink lines of his pen.

Having done that, he listed all the names of the included towns.

Then he sat down at the portable, inserted a sheet of paper and wrote:

"To the Chamber of Commerce, Azusa, California. Gentlemen: Please send me the current city directory." He looked at the postal numbers. "My mailing address is . . ." He typed in the first number on the list. " . . . Los Angeles, California. Inclosed is five dollars to defray the costs. Thanking you in advance, A. Parr."

HE studied the letter. It was a competent job of typing. He flexed his fingers, found them slightly stiff from the unaccustomed work.

He ran his eyes down the list of towns, inserted another sheet of pa-

per.

"To the Chamber of Commerce

..."

He stopped typing.

He sat before the typewriter imagining the number of directories, imagining the staggering total of individual names.

He thought of the Advanceship and its baffling array of machines that would automatically scan the directories and print a mailing label for each of the names. He thought of the vast number of parcels waiting to be labeled, as many as fuel requirements permitted the Ship to carry. And of the even vaster number that the synthesizer was adding out of the native resources. The smooth efficiency of the Advanceship, the split second timing of the whole operation . . . And all of it auxilliary timing to the main effort. Even with superior weapons, even with complete surprise, the Knougs were taking no chances. The job of the Advanceship, the job of Parr, was to demoralize the whole planet just before the invasion. To insure an already certain victory.

He turned back to the typewriter, wrote a few more words.

There was still the awareness of the enemy Cholo in the back of his mind.

He split the list of cities into six equal groups for box numbering.

Several hours later another tenant complained about the noise of the typewriter. Farr gave the clerk fifty dollars and continued to type.

CHAPTER III

PARR spent the morning of Tuesday, D-Day minus 28, in his hotel room, reliving what seemed now to be the extremely narrow escape of the previous morning. He imagined what he *might* have done: assaulted the Oholo mentally, or struck him down with the focus pistol when he tried to leave the hotel. And having imagined the situations he proceeded to explain to himself why, instead, he had fled.

At eleven o'clock, by prior arrangement, he reported to the Ship and from it received the reassuring information that the now alerted advancements had been able to find no other Oholo.

At noon he went out to eat and then for an hour walked the streets, studying the people and their city. Most particularly he listened for accent, intonation. He was afraid to drop his mind shield to try for telepathic contact with them.

A few minutes before three o'clock in the afternoon his cab drew up to the warehouse. The air was hot and sour smelling and Parr was restless. The realtor was waiting for him on the sidewalk. Parr nodded curtly. The man bent clumsily and rattled keys at the lock.

"Here it is," Lucas said.

Parr walked into the warehouse.

It was an old building. Perhaps shabbier, dustier than he had expected. The air was stale and faintly chilly with decay. Remnants of pack-

ing crates, wrapping paper, labels and twine had been heaped in a greasy pile in a far corner.

Parr sniffed suspiciously as his eyes darted around the room.

Across from him, above the rubbish, an electric box indicated that the building had at one time been industrialized at least to the extent of a few heavy power tools.

Parr walked to the stairway.

"I'll want someone to clean this mess up," he said curtly.

"Yes, sir," the realtor said.

"Tomorrow," Parr said.

"All right," the realtor said, consciously omitting the "Sir" as if to reassert his own individuality.

Parr glanced at him. "I'll send you sufficient money to cover the fee." Without waiting for an answer, he started up the stairway.

The upper two floors were in much the same condition as the first. From the third there was a narrow flight of steps slanting to the roof. Parr eyed it with disapproval.

"Narrow," he said.

"There's seldom any reason to go up there . . . sir."

PARR went up. At the top of the flight, he forced back the door and clambered into the shed which opened onto the roof. Parr dusted his knees. He stepped outside, and the gravelly finish grated under his shoes. The air smelled of warmed over tar.

He tugged restlessly at his chin. It was a good, substantial roof. As the listening post had reported. Good enough for pickup and delivery. He permitted himself a glimmer of satisfaction.

He heard movement behind him. Instinctively he whirled around, his hand dipping toward his right coat pocket, the memory of the Oholo—the vision of a composite Oholo face surprisingly like an Earth face—flashed across his mind. The realtor's head bobbed into view, and Parr relaxed his tense muscles.

"How is it up to here?"

Parr rumbled an annoyed and indistinct answer and turned once more to the roof. When the realtor stood at his side, Parr said, "I want that shed thing ripped off and a chute installed, next to the stairs. Have it done tomorrow."

"I'm . . ." the realtor began. But he looked at Parr's face and licked his lips nervously. "Yes, sir," he said after a moment "Anything I can do. Glad to oblige."

"That's what I thought," Parr said, and Lucas shifted uneasily.

Parr turned to the stairs. Going down he could see dust motes flicker in the fading light at the dirty west windows.

Outside he watched the realtor lock the doors.

"Keep the keys," Parr said. "Send them to me at the Saint Paul Thursday morning. At eight o'clock."

The realtor said, " . . . Yes, sir."

AT six o'clock Parr was in his hotel, undressed, making preliminary arrangements by telephone to hire a fleet of trucks. He had already placed an advertisement for shipping clerks and common laborers in *The Times*: interviews Thursday from ten to four at the Flower Street warehouse.

After finishing with the truckers, he phoned four furniture companies before he found one open. He ordered it to deliver a desk and two dozen folding chairs to the Flower Street warehouse Thursday morning at ninety-thirty.

All the while the Oholo was in the back of his mind, now sharp with sudden memory, now dull with continued awareness.

He checked the schedule the Ship had given him.

He took the comset, flicked it on. "Parr. I'm scheduling. I'll need a packet of money along with the dummy bundle. Can you deliver them both to the warehouse tomorrow night?"

"We can."

"Good," Parr said, swallowing, and there was perspiration on his upper lip.

"Have you contacted the Oholo again?"

He felt his blood spurt. "Not yet," he said.

He waited.

Then: "Think you can handle him mentally?"

Parr glanced at the mirror, saw how taut his reflection was.

"I'm not very sure," he said.

"Well, physically, then?"

Parr let out his breath slowly. "I don't know."

"Try. Either way. Get rid of him. An Oholo could cause the invasion trouble."

Parr plucked nervously at his leg. "If I'm not able to?"

The comset was silent for a moment. Then the impersonal voice said, "If you are killed in the attempt, we will replace you." It paused for a reply. Receiving none it continued: "Get what information you can, even at the risk of exposure. It's too late now for them to mount a defense, and they probably have no way to alert the natives. We want to know what he's doing there, and if there are any more on the planet."

"All right," Parr said, and he realized, gratefully, that, to the Ship, his voice would sound emotionless.

He dropped the comset. His hand was shaking.

Not so damned good. How to kill the Oholo?

HE tried to steady his nerves by remembering other planets, other times. He had faced danger before, and he was still alive. Except that before the danger had never been an Oholo. He had been Occupation, not Combat. He remembered the few captured Oholos he had seen. They died slowly when they wanted to be stubborn.

Finally he crossed to the bed and

stretched out naked, relaxing slowly, knowing that the time had come to get what information he could. Muscle by muscle he began to go limp.

Slowly, very slowly, he dissolved his mind shield. When it was completely gone he began to inch out, to flutter out, concentrating with all his power a stream of receptive thought on the Oholo frequencies high up and uncomfortably shrill.

He located the mind, far away, and he began to skirt in toward it, his own mind trembling in anticipation of the blow if he were detected.

He inched closer trying to make himself completely non-transmissive. He could feel seepage around the beam, and he shunted it to a lower frequency, holding it there, suppressed. The effort blunted his full concentration and when he finally began to get Oholo thoughts they were blurred. He picked up a scrap here, a scrap there, his body tense.

When he relaxed at last, forming his shield solidly, he was weak. He held the shield desperately, chinking it against a possible attack. None came. The Oholo was still completely unsuspecting, completely lulled by the security of its environment.

Feeling a sense of elation and a new confidence, Parr went to the comset. "Parr. Oholo report."

"Go ahead."

Parr concentrated on the wording, filling in the blank spots with his imagination. Suddenly he was conscious of an inadequacy, something elusive that he should be able to

add. He wrinkled his face, annoyed. But the uncertainty refused to resolve itself into words. "His name is Lauri. He's here on a mission having to do with the natives. I got no details, but it doesn't directly concern us, I'm sure of that. There appear to be several more on the planet. They seem to avoid cities, which accounts for the fact that advancement haven't reported them." For a moment, he almost placed his thoughts on the elusiveness, but again it escaped him. He paused, puzzled.

"We'll have the advancement warned. This may be damned inconvenient, Parr. If there are many of them."

"I couldn't get the exact number without exploring his mind. If I'd done that, I might not have been able to report afterwards."

"Go on."

"He's leaving the city in a few days. You still want . . . me to try to kill him?"

"Yes."

The Oholo, Parr could not help remembering, had as strong a mind as he had ever encountered.

WEDNESDAY morning Parr walked to the Biltmore, not hurrying, not anxious to face a free and dangerous Oholo.

At the side of the hotel he risked contact. A shutter movement of thought told him the quarry was still inside the building.

He crossed Olive at Fifth with the

light and angled right into Pershing Square. He located a seat from which he could observe the entrance of the Biltmore. For one moment he considered mental assault; but remembering how strong the mind was he faced he discarded that course.

He waited. He walked around the Square. The morning seemed endless.

Finally he risked another shutter of thought.

The Oholo was still there.

Noon.

He ate in a drugstore across the street.

Still there.

As the afternoon wore on, the weariness of waiting left his body and the success of the shutter contact inflamed him with confidence. He could cross the street, enter the hotel, seek out the room. But he delayed—without admitting to himself that he was still afraid.

The gloom in the air was pre-sunset, city gloom, nostalgic. He consciously dilated his pupils to accommodate the fading light, unaware now of the scurry of people on the sidewalks and the roar of the city cloaking for night amusement. Neon lights came on like cheap fire, out of the darkness, infinitely lonely.

He shifted uncomfortably. He stood up. He could wait no longer.

Then a man and woman emerged from the hotel. And he tensed. A wisp of thought, unsuspecting, floated to him on mental laughter.

The Oholo, Lauri.

He shielded his mind even tighter,

scarcely thinking.

He began to amble in the direction the couple were taking, keeping to the opposite side of the street.

At Sixth they turned toward him, waited through the yellow for the green light. They crossed.

He paused studying a Community Chest sign, his hearts pounding uncertainly. He felt a curious little probe of thought that was delicate and apologetic, as if reluctant to intrude upon anyone's privacy. It passed him by undetecting.

THE man bent toward the girl, a pert blonde, and laughed in answer to something she had said. Parr watched them go by and then at a short distance swung in behind them. He touched the focus weapon in his right hand pocket, a crystal-like disk with one side tapering to a central point. It was a short-range weapon, palm aimed, fired with an equally exerted pressure on the lateral sides.

Even with his mind closed Parr could catch ripples of Oholo thought: amusement, sympathy, appreciation. For a moment he was afraid that he had been mistaken somehow, for again there was the elusiveness, an unreality he could not account for in terms of the situation.

Parr narrowed the gap between himself and his prey.

And they turned a corner. Parr crossed the street, drew still closer, in time to hear the girl say, laughing, " . . . slumming once before I go back."

The crowd thickened and Parr found himself sidestepping passers-by. He was almost near enough, and his hand was moist on the focus gun.

The couple turned into a cellar night club. Parr swore to himself. Taking a nervous breath, he descended the steps. He nodded to the bouncer-doorman who was leaning idly against the wall.

He stepped into the night club. He saw the man help the girl to a table.

Parr brought out his hand. His eyes were suddenly hot and beady with excitement.

On the far side of the room he saw the black lettered sign, "MEN." He would, in crossing to it, pass directly by the Oholo's table.

As he began to move forward a woman stumbled unsteadily against him, knocking him off balance.

"Whynacha watch where ye're goin', ya . . .," she began shrilly, but, with his left hand, he brushed her out of his way. She took a half step backwards, undecided.

He turned to glare at her and under his gaze she looked away and tugged nervously at her dress.

Parr walked swiftly toward the rest room, his every energy concentrated on his mind shield.

As he passed the table, the girl shuffled uneasily on the chair.

Without breaking stride, Parr fired the focus gun into the man's back.

He was clear of the tables when he heard, from behind, the initial surprised, "Oh!"

He had one hand on the door marked "MEN" when he felt the confusion in his mind. Automatically, he pushed open the door. A puzzling realization that something was wrong . . .

He turned left, from the narrow corridor into the rest room proper.

And he went down to his hands and knees on the filthy tile, writhing in agony.

CHAPTER IV

THE hurt, mostly, was in his brain, and he choked back a scream. He could not think. And then the outer edge of the shield began to crumble.

He concentrated. Every muscle, bone, nerve. Veins stood out on his neck. He fought.

He was dented by fire inside his head. Hot, lancing tongues of flame. He tried to shrink away. He whimpered, groveled. His hands fumbled uselessly.

She was nearly inside of him now. It was almost over. Her thoughts were like fingers rending and tearing at quivering unprotected flesh.

He struggled hopelessly, retreating under a mental assault of unendurable ferocity. His outer memory was ripped away, a section of his childhood vanished forever.

And then there was desperation in the assault wave. He could feel her trying to shake off an attempt to breach her concentration. He stiffened, relaxed, arched his body, strug-

gled with her.

Her attack suddenly crumbled into a distracted muddle. Her concentration had been shattered.

His mind was trembling jelly, creamed with throbbing pain. But he could resist now, and slowly he forced her out.

"I'll be back!" she lashed at him. And the hate in the thought was alive. "I'll kill you for this!" Then her thoughts began slowly to fade away and her mind shield came down.

Parr shook with every muscle.

"Buddy. Buddy," someone was saying, shaking his shoulder. "You sick, huh?"

He struggled to his knee twisting his head back and forth, trying to regroup his memories. The sear places were vacant, empty, part of himself cut cleanly away. Immediate memories not yet stored and filed seemed to be floating free, unassociated—too widely spread to have been cut out, not too widely spread to have been mixed and shuffled. He was panting as he struggled with them, capturing them, tying them down, ordering them.

Then he began to vomit.

"You drink too much? Hey, buddy, you drink too much? I guess you drink too much, maybe?"

UNDERSTANDING—half understanding—came with the words. He scrambled up the wall until he was erect. His back pressed against the vertical tile for support. He

turned and staggered from the stinking rest room, his hands forcing clumsily against the walls.

In the short hallway he could hear voices.

"And when he slumped over . . ."

"She just sat there like she was *thinking* . . ."

"You see the cop shake her?"

"I thought she was gonna hit him with the ash tray."

"Well, they sure hauled her outta here!"

Parr staggered back into the night club. Eyes turned to stare at him. His head spun in nausea. He began to move leadenly toward the exit.

There was a police officer in his path.

The officer reached out to stop him, and he tried to shake the hand away from his shoulder. He tried to think, to reactivate his trained responses, knowing that he would have trouble with this man.

He muttered wordlessly.

The officer looked grim.

"Not drunk," Parr gasped. "Sick." The officer was incredulous.

Parr shook his head, and an explanation appeared from the basic psychology of the natives: a coded scrap, death-fear.

"It . . . it . . . was horrible . . . seeing him like that."

The officer hesitated.

"One minute he was alive, the next minute . . ."

"Yeah. Yeah. You better get a cab, buddy."

"Fresh air. I'll be all right, with

fresh air."

Suddenly sympathetic, the officer helped him up the stairs.

Once outside the wave of sickness began to recede. Parr waited unsteadily while the officer signaled for a cab.

As he got in the cab he whispered, "Drive."

The driver looked suspiciously at his fare, but the policeman said, "He's sick, that's all. He's just sick."

The driver grunted, meshed gears. "Where to, Mister?"

"Just drive," Parr said tonelessly, rolling down the window until he felt air hitting his face. He lay back against the seat cushions.

BALLOON-like, memories floated, rose, fell. He struggled with them. Drifting away, his hotel's name. Before he lost it, he bent forward, muttered it at the driver.

The Oholo—a female, he knew now — suddenly whispered in his mind from a distance: "You killed the wrong one, didn't you?" He struggled with his mind shield in terror, finally got it set against her. He shivered.

At the hotel, he stumbled from the cab, started in.

"Hey, Mister, what about me?"

"Eh?"

"Money, Mister. Come on, pay up!"

He fumbled at his wallet, found a bill, handed it over.

In his room at last, he peeled off his suit, his underclothes.

He lay prone on the coverlette.

After hours, or what seemed hours, his mind was stable enough for hate.

He lay in the darkness hating her. Even above the instinctive fear he hated her.

He tossed in fever thinking of after the invasion when she would be captured. The last of the sickness ebbed away. His thoughts adjusted, found more and more stability.

Slowly he drifted toward sleep which would heal up the confusions. As he hovered in the dark of near sleep, he felt a wash of mental assault from too far away to be effective. Her thoughts tapped at his shield and he dissolved it partly to let a little defiance flash out.

"I'll get you!" she answered coldly.

And after that, he slept, healing.

HE awoke, automatically assessing the damage. It was less than he had expected. Sleep had resolved it into tiny confused compartments.

And he knew how hard it would be to keep up his shield for four weeks. There was fatigue on it already.

Then, too, there was the pressure.

A gentle insistent pressure. As if to say, "I'm here." He remembered how strong Lauri's mind was and he knew that she would be able to hold the pressure longer than he could hold the shield. Once, in training he had shielded for nearly thirteen days—but now, under the sapping of his energy by physical activity, by

the multiple administrative problems, by the pressure itself . . .

He shook his head savagely.

He looked at his suit across the edge of the bed. He shuddered with the memory of his sickness and reached for the phone to order new clothing.

And the pressure. He was going to have to learn to get used to it.

Later, he reported to the Ship, his voice fumbling and hesitant.

The answer crackled back. "She's alerted the others, you idiot! We picked up her message. There's four more of them down there."

Parr tried to think of an excuse, knowing how pointless it would be even to offer one.

"You should have used your head," the Ship continued. "What made you think the Oholo was necessarily male?"

"I . . . I don't know. I just did."

"You know what happened on Zelta when an advanceman was careless? You want that to happen here?"

"I . . ."

On Zelta? He knew it should be familiar to him. He cursed inwardly, reaching for other memories, to see how many he had lost . . . A sentence, unbidden, flashed across his mind: "Never sell an Oholo short." It was what someone had told him once. "They think differently than you do." How, he pondered confusedly, could they expect him to think like an Oholo?

"I can't think like an Oholo," he

said tonelessly.

"You could . . . Never mind."

"I could? Listen, how can they be thinking, to leave a flank like this unprotected? Why didn't they take this planet into protective custody long ago? How can you *think* like that? They aren't logical. How could I know they'd let a woman . . ."

"Parr!" the Ship ordered sharply.

Parr gulped. "Sorry."

"Insurbordination on your record."

Parr clicked off the comset.

Damn! he thought angrily.

There was still the annoying pressure on his mind. "Damn you!" he thought without lowering his shield. "Damn you!" he thought again, dissolving enough of the shield to let the thought escape.

She did not answer.

There was a knock at the door.

A man with his suit.

IT was almost ten o'clock when Parr arrived at the warehouse. The windows were alive with sunshine, and through them he could see the freshly cleaned interior.

The men with the furniture were waiting, the driver angry at the delay, his assistant indifferent. Already there was a line of job applicants who shifted uneasily, eyes turned curiously upon Parr as he crossed and unlocked the warehouse doors.

Parr, one hand resting on the knob, said to the delivery man, "Bring the stuff inside."

The driver growled and picked up

a clip board from the seat. "I gotta bill here, doc. You wanna pay before I haul the stuff out?" He held out the clip board, jerking it savagely for Parr's attention.

Parr glanced at the sum. He reached for his wallet. One by one he removed the bills and handed them over to the driver. When he had met the amount there were only two bills remaining.

"Now take them inside."

"Okay, doc."

Parr went immediately to the roof. The shed had been knocked down as he had ordered, and the chute had been installed.

The two packages were lying at the top of the chute. The bundle of money and the sample, dummy parcel—both night deposited from the Ship. He picked them up.

Walking down the stairs, he peeled away the wrapper from one bundle, exposing green sheaves of currency. Back on the ground floor he put the stacks of bills on the newly arrived desk, and the dummy parcel in the drawer. He took one of the chairs, carried it to the desk and sat down.

He looked toward the door.

"You, there! At the head of the line! Come here." He was careful of his accent, realizing the necessity of impressing the waiting workers. He was pleased to find the accent near perfect.

The woman, frail and elderly came forward hesitantly. "My name is Anne, sir."

"All right," he said, reaching for a bill from the top sheaf. "I forgot to bring a pen and paper. Take this and go get some. You may keep the change, and there'll be another bill when you get back."

Her eyes widened. "Yes, sir." She held out a wrinkled hand.

He did not need to glance toward the door again to know that an initial and important impression had been established.

After she had gone, Parr leaned back in the chair and said to the other applicants, "You may come in now."

They shuffled inside.

PARR watched them settle into chairs. As he did so, he was aware of *her*, Lauri, holding the pressure steady on his mind, and memories of last night came back. Concentrating away from them he tried to analyze his feelings toward the natives. He found a mixture of contempt and indifference.

"I'm going to say this only once," he announced crisply. "I will expect you to inform any late comers. When I have finished I will interview each of you."

He balanced his hands before him on the rim of the desk, holding them steady. He looked around at the waiting faces. He let his mind relax, and the speech—it had been graven on his brain in the Ship—came bubbling to the surface. He searched forward along it, and he found it to be complete, untouched by his con-

tact with the Oholo. He wrinkled his forehead and began, seeking to give the impression that each word was being carefully considered.

"I intend to hire some of you to help me sort and load packages of promotional literature. Those hired will be paid five dollars an hour."

They shuffled unbelievably. "Yeah, but when, Mister?"

Parr's mind dipped for information. "Whenever you wish to. At the beginning of every day. Will that be satisfactory?"

The listeners twisted uncomfortably, embarrassed by their doubt. "Now you're talkin'," the original critic said.

Parr cleared his throat heavily for effect. "The work day may be as long as fourteen hours, depending on the circumstances."

No questions, now.

"The literature will come already packaged and labeled. It will be delivered to the roof by helicopter, and your job will be to sort it and transfer it to trucks." He looked them over. "I will need you for approximately three weeks."

The pressure was still on his mind, not demanding, merely present. He writhed at it inwardly. Outwardly he was calm, his voice undisturbed.

"Hey, Mister," another of them said. "I'd like to get somethin' straight right now. You ain't havin' us to handle no explosives or somethin' dangerous like that, are you?"

It was an objection Parr had been prepared for. Scarcely thinking, he

bent to the drawer and picked up the dummy parcel. He put it on the desk top.

"There is no danger. You will need no special instructions save to handle as you would normal mail. I have a sample package here." He bent over and stripped off a section of wrapping paper to permit them to see a stack of printed material.

HE rippled the dummy sheets with his thumb. "The nature of the advertising is secret for the moment, but," he lied, "this is what it looks like." He returned the bundle to the desk. "It's just paper." That was true, and he smiled faintly as he imagined the amount of disorganization mere paper would be able to accomplish. For an instant, the uncertain emotion returned as he thought of the invasion fleet, rushing communicationless through hyper-space for its rendezvous with Earth.

"There is, of course, a reason for the high wages," he said, the words coming automatically. "We want to hit the market before—ah—" and the phrase and the hesitation were memorized, calculated for effect, "a competitor."

He pursed his lips speculatively. "Naturally we want to avoid publicity. Anyone violating this requirement will be dismissed immediately."

He seemed to study the faces individually, looking for spies from the rival company.

"I will probably not require you for more than a few hours the first several days. In that event, you will receive pay for a full eight hour day."

He stopped talking, and the applicants' faces were excited.

"As soon as the woman returns with the paper, I will begin the interviews. Those of you whom I hire will receive a fifty dollar bonus before you leave the building."

When she returned, Parr interviewed. His questions were perfunctory. By noon, he had enough workers, and he had one of them hang out a penciled sign reading: "Jobs Filled." After that, he closed the doors and assembled them before him.

"If you'll form a line, I'll give you your bonuses. Give me your names to check against my list. You will sign a sheet of paper here in receipt. I've hired enough people to take care of any of you who do not choose to come back tomorrow, so there will be no further vacancies and no chance to collect a second bonus . . . Report for work at nine o'clock tomorrow morning. At that time, I'll have someone here to fill out the necessary government employment forms for each of you."

Sitting at his desk, he began to count out the bills into neat little stacks. After each applicant had signed, he pushed a stack toward him.

After that he spent the afternoon making further arrangements with

truckers and locating a woman to handle the employment records of his workers. He even had time to purchase some extra clothing and buy a few personal articles.

As night fell, while he lay comfortably naked on his hotel bed, he felt the pressure on his mind begin to fluctuate subtly.

CHAPTER V

THE Oholo, Lauri. Strong minded, yes. But untrained.

And realizing this, Parr smiled, for it testified to the certainty of his superiority, a superiority he should have recognized from the beginning. He was dealing with an amateur, an Oholo who had never received even the most elementary instruction in individual tactics.

What she was doing now was glaringly obvious to a professional: cruising the town in an attempt to locate him. But in contacting his shield by focusing the pressure, directionally, she failed to realize that the space variations would not only tell her of his location but also inform him of her movements.

Cautiously Parr began the defensive procedure. Step by step he engaged the pressure with his mind, rather than letting it rest on his shield. Then he began to counteract the distance pulsations—strengthening, weakening, presenting a continual pressure against her questing thoughts, compensating for her movements.

But in a very short time she realized what had happened. She altered the pressure sharply. A split second later he joined it again. The advantage was still his. She altered once more. He followed suit. Check.

He could almost feel her angry confusion. Then after a moment she let the pressure fall into a rhythmic pattern. A lullaby of montony that was the result of concentration rather than of the distance variations. He knew what to expect and after fifteen minutes it happened. She broke the rhythm suddenly and tried to plunge inward, to center on him before he could counter. He had not been lulled, however, and she accomplished nothing. He met the assault easily.

The rhythmic pattern returned. Every few minutes she broke the pattern and tried to plunge in again. But his mental screen absorbed the shock.

She was persistent.

Finally Parr grew weary of it — then vaguely annoyed—ther exasperated.

When he was thoroughly uncomfortable she tried another swift change of tactics. She began to increase the pressure, slowly, inexorably—stronger and stronger against his defense. He blocked her, held, retreated, held again, keeping the shield in readiness. Shortly, perspiration stood on his forehead. Abandoning the defensive he fought back against her.

But she blocked him; they locked

in a deadly mental tension of spiraling energy that weakened Parr with each passing second.

SHE held the tension longer than he would have thought possible. And when it eased, it vanished, leaving his mind uncontacted. Instead of relaxing, he formed his shielding, expecting a sudden assault.

None came. Instead, the gentle insistent pressure returned, undiminished by her efforts. She was stationary now; the pressure was steady.

His body had been tense for a long time. It ached, and he was physically exhausted. His hand shook a little as he brushed at his leg, waiting for the space variations to begin again.

They did not.

But the initial confidence—generated by the realization of her inexperience—was no longer so bright.

The very pressure itself now was an emotional drain and he wanted to lower the mind shield and relax completely. But even at a distance a mental assault would sting like a slap, like a cut, like disinfectant in a raw wound.

Under the strain, sleep was lost. Instead there was uneasiness.

He tried to ignore it. He forced himself to remember his home village. It had been a long time since he had thought of it, and at first it was difficult. But after a while, memories began to open up with nostalgia: the clumsy citizens with their mute opposition to the Empire, a

jehi farmer who had once addressed his class on planetism and afterwards been shot, the smell of the air, the look in people's eyes, night . . . the stars . . .

The stars were cold and bright and far away. Imposing symbols of Empire.

His mind turned comfortably on that, and his planet seemed dwarfed and unimportant. The Empire, with its glittering capital system, the sleek trade arteries . . . the purposeful masses of citizens . . . the strength and power of it, the essential rightness of it. Something you could feel in the air about you and smell and see. It was a thing to be believed in, to be lost in, to surrender yourself to.

It was strong, crushing opposition, rolling magnificently down the stream of time—splintering, shattering, destroying, absorbing, growing hungry and eternal. He was part of it, and its strength protected him. It was stronger than everything. There could be no doubt about Empire.

But a single Oholo was strong, too.

He stirred restlessly on the bed, unable to dissect out the thing that bothered him when he thought of the Empire. His thoughts had run the full cycle, and they were back where they had started.

It seemed for a moment as if his mind were a shiny polished surface, like an egg floating beneath his skull, hanging on invisible threads of sensation that ran to the outside world.

The room was full of moonlight.

WITH fascination he studied the wall paper, a flower design scrawled repetitiously between slightly diagonal lines of blue. He concentrated on the rough texture of the paper, let his eyes drift down to where the paper met the cream siding, revealing twin rifts of plaster. A thin line of chalk-like dust had fallen on the wood of the floor. The edge of the rug, futilely stretching for contact with the wall, curled fuzzily.

A faint breeze fluttered the half drawn blinds, puffed the lace curtains, rippled in to his bed and body.

He was guilty of something.

He wrinkled his face, puzzled. What was he guilty of?

No answer, and the moon went behind a cloud, bringing depression and acute loneliness, sharp and bitter. A depression bleak in its namelessness, and terrifying.

Then suddenly his mind jerked away from the thoughts.

He realized he was not countering the Oholo's movements. The steady pressure was a compensated pressure, varying as her distance. A projection requiring mental ability he could never hope to equal. She had learned fast. She had neatly sidestepped his defense. Terrified, he probed beyond his shield, and for an instant received an impression of her distance. He sat upright, shivering. She had worked much nearer. In desperation, he launched an assault, closing his eyes, forgetting everything else.

Lightly she parried him and slapped back strongly enough to make

him wince.

Then for two long hours they fought. He grappled with the pressure, working on the theory that it was a burden no mind could carry indefinitely.

But she did not concede. Instead she continued, giving up trying to come closer, intent on breaking down his will to resist. He checked her with all his energy. He countered, stared at the scattered moonlight on the rug.

Energy drained from him until he wanted to scream, to plead with her. And beyond the bleak reality of concentration he knew that she was using twice as much energy as he was.

Then she began to weaken. The pressure steadied, and he could feel her exhaustion. She was through for the night.

The sheets of the bed were damp. His body trembled. He wanted to whimper pathetically in fancied defeat.

Sleep slowly came, and the long pervasive influence of Empire, the influence visible in concrete form on conquered planets, swept over him.

But somehow he was guilty of something, he knew . . .

HE was still tired when he awoke, instantly alert, wary. She apparently still slept, although she held the pressure against his mind.

Dawn ushered in a cloudy day, and street noises — cars, trolleys, movement—came into the room with the utmost clarity.

He would have to change hotels. That alone had an urgency to it. Wearily he fumbled with his shield. It was still solid. He ran a hand over his forehead, pressing against the temples.

He thought of the sleeping Oholo. He dropped the shield completely, knowing she would realize its absence. He stretched mentally for a long, precious second, and it was with infinite relief.

"Hello," he leered in the direction of Lauri. "Hello," he snarled suddenly, tingling with excitement.

No answer.

"Hello! Hello! Hello!"

He shielded, and hatred of her and of all Oholos—inbred hate, overcame him. It brought an almost pathological bravado with it. The destructive drive for revenge was a surge within him. He dropped the shield and thought to her, slow and gloatingly, of the things in store for her when she was safely disarmed and helpless. And he permitted his hate to leap and caress her, and the details of the torture were etched in passion acid.

After a while, he could feel her shudder at the thoughts, and he simpered. She seemed to lie helpless, stunned under him, spurring him to greater imaginative excesses.

Then she struck out blindly, a shivering blow that caught him unaware between the eyes like a swung club.

HE shielded. Instantly he felt the guilt of last night. He was

angry at himself, as if he had acted without really wanting to, as a Knoug was supposed to act. And he snarled a curse.

The maddening, uncompromising pressure returned. Implacable. Patient. Unanswerable. Pressure that would drive him insane if he had no eventual hope of release. He shuddered, and the sense of depression — the night sense — was even more dark and terrible in daylight.

He got out of bed, reported to the Advancement, keeping his voice low and even.

"Parr. Scheduling."

"Check."

The voice from the Ship was a stabbing, accusing voice. A voice that *knew*, that had made, overnight, a secret and awful discovery about him. He wanted to grovel before it and plead for forgiveness . . .

Nonsense!

He licked his lips nervously.

"That damned female!" he shrieked.

"Eh?"

"That damned female, don't you see!"

"Parr, what's wrong? Listen, Parr, are you all right down there?"

Suddenly he relaxed. "Nothing. Nothing's wrong."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes," he said. "I'm just a little nervous."

HE ordered the driver to stop. The building was columned, red brick, decayed. The sidewalk be-

fore it was grimy, littered, cracked, chipped. Listlessly, people shuffled down the street, flecks from the vortex of humanity farther uptown drifting in the backwater of the city. Faded overalls, jeans, thin unpressed cheap suits, frayed shirts and crumpled soggy collars. Faces—lean, hollow, blotched; eyes that were harried, red, tired. The women, still trying to retain the snap of movement, were like wind-up toys, almost run down.

Parr grunted at the smells of the area, and straightening up to pay the driver, noticed distastefully the slack faces, defeated eyes and shuffling steps.

Then he knew: here, pressing in from all sides was reassurance. He watched a haggard face, felt pity, shook off the emotion as unworthy but still felt it. He could understand the haggard face. But distaste returned again, for he was superior to the face. He blocked off his mind, refusing to consider the natives any longer . . .

He took a room inside the dingy, wasted building. He hung his extra suit in the closet. The wall was greyish with cracking plaster and water stains, half hidden by the dim light; the rug underfoot was threadbare and stale. On the dresser, a Gideon Bible, nearly new.

The sheets, he discovered upon turning back the bed, were dingy and yellowish. The mattress sagged in the middle and the metal bedstead was chipped and dented.

After he was settled he reported to the Advancement, told of his new location and the reason for it.

On his way out of the hotel he was conscious of the guilt again, and in the street, he stopped an old man who wore a tobacco stained shirt and gave him several of the bills from his wallet. Bribing helplessness made him feel better.

Back in the hotel that evening, renewed confidence came as he thought how clever he had been to choose such a location; he thought of the Oholo searching across town, her mind automatically rejecting this location. It would take her more than one night to find him.

But her mind did not seek contact with his; instead, the pressure remained annoyingly general.

She was making no attempt to locate him.

He stared out the window at the pale reflection of neon from the sidewalk. She was not even moving yet.

He waited, suddenly nervous.

When she finally began to move she still kept the pressure general.

He checked her position and after an instant met opposition that scattered his thoughts. But in that space of contact he knew she had moved closer.

In terror he drew his shield in tight.

SUSPENSE mounted in his mind.

He counted his pulse beats, quieting himself. He tried to relax. Then

fearfully checked her position again. That involved receiving a sharp slap of assault, for she had been ready with an almost trigger response.

And she was closer. She seemed to be advancing confidently.

In nervous haste he began to dress.

And then she struck with her full hellish power from very near at hand.

Amazement and abject fear flamed in his mind. He fought to strengthen the shield. She forced it back, got a single hot tentacle of thought through into his mind proper, and it lashed about like a living thing before he could force it out.

Gradually he came to realize that she was not near enough for the kill.

He staggered to the door, his mind numbed and spinning as if a giant explosion had gone off by his ear.

And then, somehow, he was in the street, half dressed. Somehow he managed to find a cab. It was all a blur to him that might have taken two minutes, five minutes, or twenty minutes. She had abandoned the assault. She was moving closer.

Then, before the cab began to move he saw her. Two blocks away. Coming toward him. Her face was impassive, but even at a distance, the eyes . . . or was it his imagination? The focus gun . . . in his pocket . . . The cab drew away. He leaned out the window, twisting back, tried to aim at her. The shot, silent and lethal, sped away. The distance was too great.

Then a new assault, but it was too late. He held it until the cab

outdistanced it. She renewed the pressure and he could think again. And he knew, in the back of his mind, that soon now they would meet. And he shuddered, wondering of the outcome.

HE was sick. Unbelievably, she had outguessed him. She had guessed he would flee away from the obvious to the other extreme.

His breathing was hoarse and painful, and he thought comfortingly of his home planet; a small planet with a low sky; incredibly blue, a trading station far removed from Earth, satisfyingly deep in the Empire. As a boy he had often gone to the space port to watch the ships. He remembered how he had stood watching their silvery beauty and their naked violence. He had always been very excited by them. Always. And they were a symbol of Empire.

After the cab driver had spoken to him several times he roused himself to say, "A hotel, any hotel."

It was luck he knew, that he had been beyond effective range. She might have guessed the correct slum hotel and stood below his window.

His mind was foggy and befuddled.

And he had been hurt. Much more than mentally hurt. More than physically hurt. He wanted to hurt something in return. Only now he was too tired.

He relaxed in the seat, listened to the hiss of tires. He would be able to sleep tonight. She could not figure

out his next move, predicted on random selection.

In his new hotel room he found that his body stung and itched.

And she began to search for him.

He had to fight her for more than an hour, and after that he slept, subconsciously keeping his shield on a delicate balance.

CHAPTER VI

THE next day Parr went first to the post office and from there immediately to the warehouse. He brought with him three manila envelopes containing three city directories, the first responses to his requests. He took them to the roof, checked the three cities off his list, placed the directories at the base of the chute. Later the helicopter would come swishing down from the night sky, collect them, and return tomorrow evening with the compressed and labeled parcels, one to a family, stamped with the requisite postage. The parcels, spilling out of the compressor, would expand to a huge jumbled heap for the natives to handle. And Parr knew he was only one of many advancementmen. The cargos would nightly spew to all points of the Earth from the Advancementship slowly circling the globe behind the sun.

Complete coverage was what the Knougs were aiming at. Here advancementmen were using the government postal system for distribution; there, making arrangements for private de-

livery; elsewhere, setting up booths. Earth had been scouted very thoroughly by four prior Intelligence expeditions. It was an inconceivably complex network of planning, possible only through extreme specialization in an organization made frictionless by obedience.

THAT night Lauri's pressure increased—or seemed to — and he shook his head like a hooked fish. He began to walk faster, mumbling under his breath.

The solution, he knew, was distance. A partial solution only for he was bound by assignment to commuting range, not great enough to permit him to lose her completely.

The jangle and clank of a city train roused him. An interurban trolley. It was stopped at the next corner accepting passengers.

He turned and ran the quarter block to board it.

As he rode toward the ocean he could feel the gradual lessening of the pressure; it was a lessening not nearly as pronounced as he would have felt were she trying to center on him as he fled, but sufficient to relax him. He could feel a puzzled pressure shift after a few miles as she checked him briefly, then an over excessive spurt of questing thought which he countered automatically. Even if he only remained shielded it would take her at least a week to localize him except in a very general direction.

He began to feel all of the over-

charged tenseness drain out of his muscles. He even began to take an interest again in his surroundings, studying the buildings with appreciation. The incongruity of the architecture was more apparent than before, due to his greater acquaintance with the thought patterns of the natives.

A bizarre sight: a temple in the style of the Spanish, low-roofed, unpretentious, comfortably utilitarian with no nonsense except for the gleaming gold minaret atop it, its coiled surface outlined with neon tubing.

It drifted away, behind.

Here a huddled shop, antique-filled and sedate, less than a block from a brilliant drive-in in disk form, radially extending like a somnolent spider.

And most paradoxical of all, the false glamor of signs encouraging the spectator to rub shoulders with excitement that was supposed to be inside the door, but wasn't. For people who were incapable of finding it anywhere. Parr felt suddenly sad.

Odd natives, he thought. But even odder thoughts for a Knoug, he knew. Then he felt the savage stirrings inside of him again. It brushed away sadness. The numbered days until the invasion excited him. The emotional surge of danger and trial and obedience were the preludes to the necessary relief.

Parr felt fully relaxed.

HE got off the trolley in Santa Monica, where the night fog

was already fingering in from the ocean.

He crossed the wide street, angled toward the Mira Mar hotel.

In his room he stood looking out across the street over the stretch of park that broke suddenly as a dull clift, dropping jaggedly to the road beneath. Beyond were buildings unusually small and squalid in sea perspective. The beach, curving north to Malibu; and the sea itself was overshadowed toward the Ocean Park Pier by the brazen glitter of red neon.

But the fog was quieting the scene, and isolating it. After a bit there was no world beyond the window but the grey damp world of fog.

Still the excitement beat at him. He projected his thoughts beyond the immediate future to the bright burning of the Oholo System, the atomic prairie fire skipping from sun to sun at the core, leaving the planets ashes—while isolated, the periphery worlds would one by one capitulate to Knoug power, to Knoug *will*, and become infected with Destiny.

Beyond that?

The doubt came, and he cringed mentally.

He was guilty of something.

His hands whitened on the sill, and staring into the fog he tried to bring all of the weight of Empire to his support.

But there was the memory of revolt by Knougs themselves on a tiny,

distant moon.

The depression came back.

. . . It took the Oholo four nights to locate him.

CHAPTER VII

THE strain on his face—the heaviness of his eyes—the taut lines of his throat. His body was exhausted.

Like dripping water the pressure pounded at him.

The night before, she had found him at Long Beach.

He cast off the depression to find euphoria; and the two alternated steadily with increasing peaks.

His hands were nervous. Blunt thumbs constantly scrubbed blunt fingertips in despair or anticipation.

. . . The trucking had all been arranged for.

The deliveries from the Ship occurred nightly. He had sent follow-up letters to cities who had not responded to his first request. The answers had finally arrived.

The warehouse, floor by floor, was filling. Already some trucks were waiting.

There was the continual bump of handled packages sliding from the chute, being sorted, being stacked. But worries piled up inside of him: fears of an accident, a broken package, a suspicious employee, a fire . . . The Oholo, the guilt, the depression.

Eagerly now he listened to the general information report from the

Ship. Most advancements were on schedule. No irreparable accidents. Certain inaccessible areas had been written off. A few advancements recalled for necessary Ship duty. One killed, replaced, in Germany. World coverage estimated at better than seventy per cent in industrial and near industrial areas, a coverage probably exceeding the effective minimum—short only of the impossible goal.

He had been talking to a trucker in front of him without really hearing his own words, his fingers and thumbs rubbing in increased tempo.

He hated the man as he hated everyone in the building, everyone on the planet.

The trucker shrugged. "I'll have to deadhead back. That has to go in the bill, too."

"All right," Parr snapped irritably. "Now, listen. This is the most important thing. Each of the lots has to be mailed at the proper time. Your bonus is conditional on that."

"Okay," the trucker said.

"I can't overstress the importance of that," Parr said. He handed the slip of paper across the table. It was a list of mailing information, Ship compiled, that was designed to assure that the packages would all be distributed by the mails as near simultaneously as possible.

"You deliver the Seattle lot, that's number, ah, eighteen on the list, the last."

"I understand."

"When your trucks are loaded, you

may leave. I'll pay you for lay-over time."

"I've got a bill here," the trucker said.

The two huddled over it, and after the trucker had gone Parr leaned back staring at the ceiling, his nerves quivering.

HE knew what he was guilty of, at last. Knowledge came suddenly, from nowhere like an electric shock, and it stunned him. Logically he demanded proof; but there was no proof. It came, it was; it was beyond logic. Nothing in his memory . . . and for a moment he thought he had lost the memory under Lauri's first vicious assault ripping into his mind; but, and again without reason, he knew it was not in the memory she had destroyed. She was connected with it, but not like that . . . He was guilty of treason. He could not remember the act, but he was guilty. What? When? Why? He did not know; he was guilty without knowing what the treason was: only the overpowering certainty of his guilt. Wearily he let his head droop. Treason . . .

"Mister Parr?"

"Eh? Eh?"

"There's somethin' heavy in this one. It don't feel like paper. I think it's metal of some sort. Now, look, Mister Parr, I don't want to get tied up with somethin' that's not square. You said all these packages had paper in them. And I'd kinda like to see what else there is in this

one, Mister Parr, if you don't mind."

Parr wanted to jump out of the seat and smash at the man's face. But he forced himself to relax.

"You want to open the package, is that it?" he said, gritting his teeth.

"Yes, Mister Parr."

" . . . Then go ahead and open it."

Having expected refusal, the worker hesitated.

"Go ahead," Parr insisted. He kept his face expressionless, although, beneath desk top level, his hands bunched into knobby fists, white at the knuckles.

Then at the last possible second, as the worker's fingers were fumbling at the wrapping, Parr leaned forward. "Wait a minute. It won't be necessary to waste the parcel . . . Unless you insist."

The worker looked at Parr uncomfortably.

A question of timing. Events hung in a delicate balance between exposure and safety. Parr reached for the drawer of the desk, his movements almost too indifferently slow.

His hand fumbled inside the drawer. "I think I have some of the metal samples around here," he said. His hand found the stack of gleaming dummy disks, encircled it possessively. He tossed them carelessly on the desk top and one rolled, wobbling, to the edge and fell to the floor.

PUZZLED, the worker bent to the one that had fallen, picked it

up, turned it over in his hand, studying it curiously.

"I don't see . . .," he said suspiciously.

"That's our product," Parr lied. "We include some in every hundred or so bundles. The literature explains their function."

The worker shook his head slowly.

"As you can see," Parr persisted gently, "they're perfectly harmless." He tensed, waiting.

" . . . Yeah, uh . . . I think I get it. Something like them hollow cement bricks they use to cure people of rheumatism with, huh?"

Parr swallowed and relaxed. "That's the general idea. You'll see . . . Well, if you want to, go ahead and open the parcel."

"Naaah," the man said foolishly. " . . . There wouldn't be no sense in doin' that."

Beneath the desk top again, his hands coiled and flexed in anger and hatred. "I want your name," Parr said, a very slight note of harshness in his voice.

The worker let his eyes turn to the backs of his heavy hands, guiltily. "Look, Mister Parr, I didn't mean . . ."

Parr silenced him with an overdrawn gesture. "No, no," he said, his voice normal and conciliatory. "I meant, we might be able to use a man like you in our big plant in the East." He snarled inwardly at himself for the unnecessary note of harshness before: it was too soon for that.

Suddenly stammering with excitement, the worker said, "My name's George . . . George Hickle . . . George Hickle, Mister Parr. I got good letters from back home about my workin', sir."

"Where do you live, George?"

"Out on Bixel . . . Just up from Wilshire, you know, where . . ."

"I meant the number of the house, George."

"Oh." George told him.

Parr wrote it down. "George Hickle, uh-huh."

"I'll be mighty obliged, Mister Parr, if you'll keep me in mind."

"Yes. Well. Good afternoon, Hickle. You ought to be getting back to your work now, hadn't you?"

And when the worker had half crossed the room, Parr drew a heavy, black line through the name. He had memorized it.

The pencil lead broke under the pressure.

And at that moment, the pressure in his mind vanished.

In automatic relief, he relaxed his shielding for the first time in what seemed years, and before he could rectify the error Lauri hit him with everything she had, catching him just as the shield began to reform.

PAIN roared in his mind. From the force of the blow he knew that she must be near the warehouse.

It had been one quick thrust, leaving his mind throbbing and he sobbed in impotent hate and anger.

The pressure was back.

And slowly and surely she was closing in on him, compensating. She had struck prematurely, realized her mistake, and was narrowing the range, holding the final assault until assured of victory.

He stood up weakly and hurried to the door, brushing through a group of startled workers.

Outside, a cab was cruising, and Parr ran after it. It did not stop. He turned and ran frantically in the opposite direction, rounded the corner, still running, his heels thudding on the hot pavement.

He ran for blocks, the blood pounding in his head, sweat trickling into his eyes. Pedestrians turned to stare, looking back along his line of flight.

When Parr stopped, finally, he was trembling. He stared at his own hands curiously, and then he looked around him.

He swallowed hard. The world swam, steadied. His chest rose and fell desperately . . .

At the airport, he phoned the warehouse.

"Hickle? Get me Hickle . . . Hello, Hickle, this is Parr. Listen, Hickle, are you listening? Hickle, I've got to leave town for two days. You've got to run things. You understand? Listen. I've left money in the drawer of my desk . . . for the pay roll . . . You know how to run things, don't you, Hickle? . . . Now, listen, Hickle, there's some trucking . . . wait a minute . . . Look . . . You stay down there. Right there. I'll phone you back, long distance, later. Don't go

away, Hickie. Wait right there. I'll tell you what you've got to do."

The last call for his plane came over the loudspeaker.

"Listen, Hickie, I've got to run. I'll phone you later, so wait. Wait right there, Hickie!"

OVER Bakersfield, gratefully — infinitely gratefully — he felt the last wisp of pressure vanish.

He was free.

There was no consequence powerful enough to keep him from dropping his mind shield entirely. But he let it come down slowly, barrier by barrier, enjoying the release, prolonging the ultimate freedom beyond.

At last the roar of the motors, muffled, sang in his head like an open song, and there was nothing between his thoughts and the world.

His mind stretched and trembled and pained from the stress, and quivered and fluttered and pulsed and throbbed and vibrated and rejoiced.

He looked out over the wing, through the whirring propellers, at the hazy horizon at the cloudless sky, bright and blue and infinite.

It was the best day he had ever known. It was freedom, and he had never known it before.

His mind was infinitely open as the sky above the clouds, and he stretched it out and out until he forced the limit, beyond which no mind may go, yet wanting to plunge on.

In the east, there was the dusk of

night coming down, a cloak pulled up from the other side of the world by the grapple hooks of dying sunshine.

In San Francisco he phoned Hickie in Los Angeles, a man and a place so far removed that he wanted to shout to make himself heard over the telephone.

Then to a hotel—but now as a place of rest and refuge, not a symbol of flight and fear. His hate returned, beautiful, now, flower-like, delicate, to be enjoyed. To be tasted, bee-like, at his leisure.

The city outside was a whirl of lights and the lights hypnotized him with their magic. Soon he was in the streets.

There were cabs and scenes: laughter, love, death, passion—everything rolled into a capsule bundle for him. The city spread out below in a fabric of light, the hazy blue of cigar smoke closely pressing sweaty bodies, laughing mouths. A swirl of sensations.

"Somewhere else!" he cried madly to a driver.

China Town, The International Settlement, Fisherman's Wharf . . . The cabbies knew a tourist.

HE had been moving for hours, and now he was tired and lost, and he could not find a cab to get back to the Sir Francis Drake.

A girl and a sailor passed. A tall lithe blonde with a pert nose and high cheek bones and brown eyes heavy lips and free hips . . . a . . .

blonde.

The Oholo . . . Lauri . . . was a blonde.

He began to cast up memories of her, sickeningly, making his fists clench.

He wanted a blonde to smile at him, unsuspecting. A blonde with honey colored hair and a long, slim throat with a blue vein in it, so he could watch the heart beat. He wanted to hurt the blonde, and hold her, and caress her softly, and . . . most of all, hurt her.

He wanted to shake his fists at the sky and scream in frustration.

He wanted to find a blonde . . .

Finally he found one. In a small, red-fronted bar, dimly lit. She was sitting at the end of the bar, facing the door, toying with a tall drink, half empty, from which the ice had melted.

"What'll it be, Mister?"

"Anything! Anything!" he said excitedly as he slipped behind a table, his eyes still on the woman at the bar.

"And the same for me?"

"Sure. Sure."

She brought back two drinks, picked up a bill, turned it over in her hand speculatively. She wore an off the shoulder dress, and high rouge on her Mexican cheeks. She made change from her apron, putting the money beside the second glass, sitting down in front of it, across from him.

Still he had not noticed her.

Two patrons entered. They moved

to a table in the far corner near the Venetian blinds of the window and began to talk in low husky voices.

"I'll be back, dearie," the woman across from Parr said, sipping her drink, smearing the glass rim in a veined half moon.

She went to serve the girls.

When she came back Parr had brushed away the drink from in front of him.

"Listen, dearie," she said. "You got troubles?"

He grunted.

She snaked an ample hand half across the table and wiggled her shoulders to show off her breasts. "I bet I know what's wrong with you. Same as a lotta men, dearie. Want a little fun, I bet."

"Bring me that blonde," he said hoarsely.

"Listen, dearie, you don't want her. What you want . . ."

"The blonde!"

RELUCTANTLY she stood up, frightened by his tone. She put a hand over his change, waited.

He did not notice.

She put the money into her apron pocket, heaving her chest.

Then she got the blonde.

"You wanna buy me a drink, honey?" the blonde said.

"Sit down!"

The blonde turned to the Mexican. "Make it a double." She sat down.

"Talk!"

"Whatdaya wan' me to say, ho-

ney?"

"Just talk." He had seen the pulse in the vein in her neck. The neck was skinny, and the face was pinched, lined with heavy powder. Her eyes were weary, and her thin hands moved jerkily.

"Just talk."

When she saw his wallet, as he brought it out to pay, she said, "Maybe we oughtta go somewhere to talk." Her voice was flat and nasal, and she tossed her head. She ruffled her coarse dirty-colored hair with an automatic gesture.

Parr wanted to kill her, and his hands itched at the delicious thought.

But not tonight. Not tonight. He was too tired. He . . . tonight he just wanted to think about it. And then he wanted to sleep and rest and think.

She tossed off the drink. "Another one, Bess," she said shrilly, glancing at him.

He took two bills out of his wallet, two twenties, put them on the table, pushed one of them toward her without looking at it.

She drank two more shots quickly, eagerly, hungrily, as if there was need to rush through them and get them safely inside.

She leaned across the table, her eyes heavy. "I'm gonna talk, okay? Man wants to hear woman talk. Get yer kicks like that, okay. You're buyin' . . . Hell, I bet you think I'm a bad girl. I'm not a bad girl — bad girl." Her hands twitched drunkenly below her flat breasts. "There was a

sonofabitch in my town . . . I came from up north, Canada." She drank again, hastily. "I could go for you, know what? . . . I'm getting drunk, that's what. Fooled ja, didn't I? Listen. You wouldn't believe this, but I can cook. Cook. Like hell. Wouldn't think that, eh? Hell, I'm good for a lotta things. Like being walked on. Jever wanna wanna—walk on a girl? Listen. I knew a guy, once . . ."

Parr said, "Shut up!" For one instant, there was sickness and revulsion, and desire to comfort her, but it vanished almost before it was recognized.

She closed her mouth.

He pushed the twenty dollar bill into her lap.

"You be here tomorrow. Tomorrow night."

"Okay."

"You be here tomorrow night."

"Sure, sure, honey."

"You be here tomorrow night, and don't forget it."

She smiled drunkenly. "I'm here . . . most nights, honey . . ."

"You be waiting for me."

"I'm always . . . waitin', honey. Ever since I remember, honey, waitin'. Just waitin', honey."

But the next morning, when Parr awoke, Lauri was trying to center on his open mind. She was in San Francisco, looking for him.

The depression came back, and the guilt—the knowledge of treason—that made him want to go to a mirror and stand, watching blood trickle down his face in cherry rivulets like

tears.

And fear.

When he shielded, she resumed the pressure.

AT noon he was back in Los Angeles. Perspiration was under his skin, waiting icily.

He went directly to the warehouse.

Hickle, in surprise, crossed the room to him. "Mister Parr!" he said.

The right corner of Parr's mouth was twitching nervously. "Get a chair. Bring it to the desk.

When Hickle was seated before him, Parr said, "Okay. I've got some papers. I'm going to explain them to you." He got them out. "They're all alike in form. Here." He took off the top sheet and Hickle stood up to see. "This number, here, is for the truck unit." He circled it and scribbled the word "truck." "This number." He circled it. "This number is the lot number. You see, truck number nine has lots seventeen, twenty-seven, fifty-three, thirty-one."

"I get it," Hickle said.

Parr's body was trembling and he threw out a tentative wave of thought probing for the Oholo, afraid that she might come silently, knowing his approximate daytime location. He began to talk rapidly, explaining.

It was D-Day minus seven.

After fifteen minutes, he was satisfied that Hickle understood the instructions.

"There was a plain bundle this morning?"

"Yes, sir. I wondered about that."

"Get it."

Hickle got it.

Parr opened it. "Pay roll money, trucker money. Give the truckers their money when they give you their bills. I'm going to trust you, Hickle."

Hickle gulped. "Yes, sir."

Parr began to stuff money into his wallet.

She was in Los Angeles. He knew by the pressure on his mind.

"I've got to hurry. Listen. I want you to keep the workers here as long as necessary, hear? This schedule's got to be kept. And you take a thousand dollars. And listen, Hickle. This is just chicken-feed, remember that, when you're working for us."

"Yes, sir!"

He had her located, keeping his mind open to try to center on her.

HE could center on her! She was only partially shielded, and she made no protest. She was not moving, and he could . . . except that there was something wrong with the pressure. He was overlooking something. But she was not moving. Not yet.

"I've got to talk fast. All these final deliveries. You'll be busy. If you need help, hire it. And listen, I'll be here from time to time if I can."

"There's something wrong, Mister Parr?"

Parr searched for an excuse. "It's personal . . . my wife, yes, my wife, it's . . ." He wondered why he had

used that one. It had sprung automatically to his mind. "Never mind. I'll phone in from around town. I'll try to help you all I can by phone."

She was not moving, but the pressure seemed different . . . *alien!*

He jerked out of his seat, kicking the chair over as he headed for the door.

A different Ohoho!

There were two of them in Los Angeles!

He probed out.

Lauri was almost on top of him.

He skidded through the door, into the street, knocking a startled man out of his path.

He stared wildly in both directions. Several blocks away a cab was stalled with a red light.

And almost before him, a private car was headed uptown. With three huge leaps he was on the running board, yanking the door open.

He jerked himself in beside the frightened driver.

He twisted his head, shouting. "Emergency! Hospi . . . "

She had seen him trying to escape. She struck.

In the street, a flock of English sparrows suddenly faltered in flight, and one plunged blindly into the stone face of a building. The others circled hysterically, directionless, and two collided and spilled to the ground.

"Hurry, damn it!" Parr moaned at the driver. "Hurry!"

He slammed forward into the windshield, babbling.

The terrified driver stepped down on the accelerator. The car leaped forward.

Parr, fighting with all his strength, was twisted in agony, and blood trickled from his mouth.

He gasped at the driver: "Cab. Behind. Trying to kill me."

The driver was white-faced and full of movie chases and gangster headlines of shotgun killings, typical of Southern California. He had a good car under him, and he spun the wheel to the right, cutting into an alley; to the left, onto an intersecting alley; to the right, into a crosstown street; then he raced to beat a light.

He lost the cab finally in a maze of heavy traffic at Spring.

Parr was nearly unconscious, and he struggled desperately for air.

Run, run, run, he thought despairingly, because two Cholos are ten times as deadly and efficient as one . . .

CHAPTER VIII

D-DAY minus four General mailing day.

Parr, his mind fatigued, his body tense, phoned the warehouse twice, and twice received enthusiastic reassurances behind which he could hear the hum and clatter of parcels being moved, trucks being loaded . . . cursing and laughing and subdued shouting.

'How many hours now? His mind was clogged and stuffy and sluggish.

An hour's sleep, ten minutes sleep—any time at all. If it could be spent in clear, cold, *real* sleep.

Eat, run. Always, now, he was running, afraid to stop longer than a few minutes. He needed time to *think*.

And the pressure was steady.

Get away. Leave Los Angeles!

"Parr, Parr. This is Parr," he whispered hoarsely from the back seat of the moving cab into the comset.

The rhythm of the engine, the gentle sleepy swaying of the car and the monotony of the buildings lulled him. He caught himself, shook his head savagely.

Dimly he could understand the logic advising him to remain in the city. But it was not an emotional understanding and it lacked the sharpness of reality. For now the two Oholos could follow him easily, determining his distance and direction. If he left Los Angeles, the focus of the invasion, it would be difficult to return after postal delivery. After the invasion it would be nearly impossible. It would give the Oholos added time to run him down. But to remain . . . His body could not stand the physical strain of four more days of continual flight, around, around, up Main—to the suburbs—to the ocean—back to Main again—down the speedway to Pasadena and through Glendale to Main. Change cabs and do it all over again.

"Yes?" the Advanceship said.

"I'm . . . leaving. I've got to leave. I've got to." And suddenly, in addi-

tion to the other consideration, he was afraid to be there when the invasion hit. Was it because he was afraid they knew of his treason? Or . . . was it because . . . he liked the buildings? Strangely, he did not want to see the buildings made rubble . . .

The answer: "You have a job to do."

"It's done!" he cried in anguish. "Everything's scheduling. In a few hours now it'll be all over. I can't do anymore here."

A pause.

"You better stay. You'll be safer there."

"I *can't!*" Parr sobbed. "They'll catch me!"

"Wait."

A honk. The purr of the engine. Clang. Bounce. Red and green lights.

" . . . If the mailings are secure, you have the Ship's permission. Do whatever you like."

Expendable.

Parr put the comset in his coat pocket and cowered into the seat.

"Turn right!" he said suddenly to the driver. "Now . . . now . . . Right again!"

He bounced.

He closed his eyes, resting them. "Out Hill," he said wearily without opening his eyes.

He withstood an irritated mental assault. They were tiring. But not as fast as he was.

THE silent pursuit: three cars out of the multitudes, doggedly

twisting and turning through the Los Angeles streets—separated by blocks, even by miles, but bound by an unseen thread that was unbreakable.

"I gotta eat, buddy."

Parr drew himself erect. "A phone! Take me to a phone!"

The taxi ground to a stop in a service station.

Nervously, Parr began to phone airports. Three quarters of his mind was on his pursuers.

On the third try he got promise of an immediate private plane.

"Have it ready!" he ordered. Then, dropping the receiver he ran from the station to the cab.

He jockeyed for nearly thirty minutes for position.

Then he commanded the driver to abandon the intricate inter-weaving and head directly for the airport in Santa Monica.

Shortly, the two other cars swung in line, down Wilshire.

THE job of softening up Earth for the invasion began to pass entirely from the hands of the advancemen. From a ticklish, dangerous proposition at first to a virtual certain mailing day. The world wide mechanism of delivery swung into operation from time zone to time zone, and, in the scheme of conquest the advancemen passed from integral factors to inconsequential objects.

All over America, from East to West, within the space of a single day the post office became aware of the in-

creased, the tremendously increased volume. Previously in certain sections there had been signals in the form of out-bound dribbles. Now there were in-bound floods rising suddenly to the peak intensity of overtime inundations. A million packages, some large, some small, some brown wrapped, white wrapped, light, heavy—no two alike, no way to tell the new influx from the normal handling.

At the very first each office saw the rush as a unique phenomenon—for there was no reason to report it to a higher echelon which might have instituted an investigation. Merely to take care of the rush, that was all. To process the all-at-once congestion of parcels to be door to door delivered. Later to be marveled at.

Lines formed at parcel windows; trucks spewed out their cargos. Lights burned late; clerks cursed and sweated; parcels mounted higher and higher.

Nor did it break all at once in the press. The afternoon editions carried a couple of fillers about how Christmas seemed to be coming early for the citizens of Saco, Maine, and how a tiny Nevada town whose post office was cob-webby from lack of use suddenly found itself doing a land office business.

Most of the morning editions carried a whimsical AP article that the late radio newscasters picked up and rebroadcast. Then after most West Coast stations were off the air for the night events began to snowball

in the East.

The breakfast newscasts carried the first stories. The morning papers began to tie in the various incidents and reach astonishing conclusions . . .

THE propeller was not even turning over. The plane, wheeled out of the hanger, was waiting, cold, and the pilot lounged by the office, smoking a cigarette.

The sky was black, and here and there before the blatant searchlights sprouting from dance halls and super markets, clumps of lacy California clouds fluttered like dingy sheepwool in a half-speed Mix-Master.

Parr, tossing a handful of bills at the driver, leaped from the cab and ran frantically toward the office.

The wait was terrible. Should the Oholos arrive, he was boxed in spaciouly, with no escape. In gnawing at the inner side of his lower lip, he bit through his disguise into real flesh and real blood.

There were forms to sign, responsibility to be waived.

And with every minute, *they* drew nearer.

Finally the airplane motor coughed into reluctant life, and Parr could feel the coldness of artificial leather against his back.

The ship shuddered, moved heavily, shifted toward the wind onto the lighted runway. The motor roared louder and louder and the ship trembled. Slowly it began to pick up

speed, the wings fighting for lift.

A searchlight from the pier made a slow ring of light toward the invisible stars.

The ground fell away and Parr was on his way to Denver.

Almost immediately, with the pressure still on his mind but fading swiftly, he fell into a fitful sleep and dreamed of treason, while, in the background ominous clouds shifted and gathered to darken the sun of his native planet. Finally, all was a starless black except for half-forgotten faces which paraded before him, telling his treason with hissing tongues in words he could not quite grasp the meaning of.

THE air of Denver was clear and bright—crystal clear, drawing in the mountains, opening up the sky like a bent back box top. The new sun seemed small.

Parr stood on a street corner acutely aware of the thin air and the bright clean sky. An open sky that seemed to be trying to talk to him. He snorted at the absurdity of the thought but he strained half consciously to listen.

He walked on, his feet tapping sharply on the concrete, his mind foggy from the uncomfortable sleep.

A building to the left momentarily reminded him of a slide shown long ago in a classroom on a distant planet, and he wondered if the picture had been taken in this city (knowing, deeply, that it could not have been).

Parr took a newspaper from a stand. Tucking it under his arm he continued to walk until he found a hotel.

He ate breakfast hurriedly in the annex and then rented a room with a radio. He went to it, lay relaxing on the bed, his mind open and free but uneasy again as he thought of treason.

"Parr," he said into the comset. "I'm in Denver."

"Have you escaped?"

"They will follow me," Parr said wearily. "But for the moment, I'm free."

"We'll send our Denver advance-man to you," the Ship said. "The two of you should be able to handle the Oholos."

Parr's mouth was dry. He named the hotel.

"Wait, then."

He lay back but felt no exultation. He tried to force it, but there was nothing.

And then, staring at the headlines, knowledge of success broke all around him and he was trembling and jubilant. He sprang up, paced the room, moving his hands restlessly.

He rushed to the window, looked out into the street. The people below passed in a thin nervous stream. Unusually few; many more were glued at home, waiting for the mail.

A postal delivery truck turned the corner, rolled down the street before the hotel. All action ceased; all eyes turned to watch its path.

Parr wanted to hammer the wall

and cry, "Stop! Stop! I've got to ask some questions first! Stop! There's something wrong!"

PARR was shaking. He sat on the bed and began to laugh. But his laughter was hollow.

His victory—a Knoug victory . . . He frowned. Why had he automatically made a differentiation where there should be none? He realized that the mailing success had released him from nervous preoccupation in Knoug work; for the first time he was free of responsibility, and he could think . . . clearly . . . about . . . He wanted to hammer the terrifying new *doubts* out of his mind. But they gathered like rain clouds. He went to the mirror and fingered his face. "What's wrong? What's wrong?" Knoug victory had a bitter taste.

He suddenly pictured the civilization around him as a vast web held in tension by a vulnerable thread of co-operation, now slowly disintegrating as the thread crumbled. And he took no joy in the thought.

He began to let images float in his mind. Imagined scenes, taking place beyond the walls.

A man went in to pay off a loan, his pockets stuffed with money.

"I'm not taking it."

"Whatsa matter? It's legal tender. You gotta take it."

Bills on the counter.

"You didn't earn that!"

"It don't matter."

"It isn't any good. Everybody's

got it."

"That don't *matter*."

"It's worthless!"

"Yeah? Listen: 'For all debts, public and private . . .'"

Parr's mind reached out to grasp the unsettling immensity of it. He flipped on the radio, half heard an excited announcer.

Parr thought: All over the world, each to his own: coins, bills, dollars, rupees, pesos, pounds — how many million parcels were there? Each stuffed with enough to make its owner a man of wealth, as wealth was once measured.

Parr thought it was terrifying, somehow.

And the headline of the paper admitted: "No Test To Reveal Good Money From Bad."

(There was a mob. They were storming a liquor store, while the owner cowered inside. He was waiting for the police. But the police were too busy elsewhere, so finally, to salvage what he could before the mob took his stock for nothing he opened the door, crying, "Form a line! Form a line!")

Parr thought of the confusion that would grow.

Prices spiraling.

(In the United States Senate, a member took the floor to filibuster until California had its mail delivery and its fair share of the free money.)

This was the day work stoppages would begin.

FAMINE PREDICTED . . .

PRESIDENT IN APPEAL TO . . .
GUARD MOBILIZED . . .

Riots. Celebrations. (A church burned the mortgage gratefully.) Clean shelves. Looming scarcity.

By the time the sun dipped into the Pacific, the whole economic structure of the world would be in shambles.

Governments doubtless would blame each other (half-heartedly), propose new currency, taxes, and the gold standard again.

Industrial gears would come unmeshed as workers took vacations. Electric power, in consequence would begin to fail.

(Looting already occupied the attention of the better part of the underworld, and not a few respectable citizens decided to get it now and store it for use when it would be unavailable because others had done likewise.)

Stagnation tomorrow. But as yet, the fear and hysteria had not really begun. Parr shuddered, sickened. "What have I *done*?"

It would take months to unuddle the chaos.

Earth was ripe for invasion . . .

PARR aroused from a heavy stupor. The pressure was back. He moaned, and the knock on the door jolted him into startled animal movement.

The knob turned. Parr tensed, although he could tell that the Oholo team was still distant. "Who is it?"

The door opened and a disguised

Knoug slipped through. Immediately behind him a simian-like Earthman towered. "Come in," the Knoug said. When they were inside, he shut the door.

"The Ship sent me over," the Knoug said. "You wanted help? My name's Kal. You probably remember me on Ianto?"

Parr swung his legs from the bed and stood up. "You feel the pressure?"

Kal rumbled angrily.

"Two Oholos," Parr said. "I've been dodging them."

"Two, eh? Okay. It's a good thing I brought Bertie along. Two, you say. Well I'll be damned."

Kal turned to the Earthman. "There'll be two, Bertie. So watch yourself . . ."

Bertie grunted noncommittally.

"Okay. Now like I told you, shoot when I give you the mental signal. You'll see the ones."

"Uh-huh," Bertie said, chewing complacently.

"Go on downstairs then."

Bertie hunkered forward and leered at Parr. "Sure. Sure."

"Hurry the hell up," Kal said.

Bertie shuffled to the door, opened it, left the room.

Parr swallowed uneasily.

Kal chuckled. "Good one, Bertie. Useful. Damn this pressure. Glad I brought him. They won't be looking for an Earthman, eh? So when they try to come in here after us, he'll drop 'em, eh?"

Parr wet his lips. "They're get-

ting nearer."

"Relax," Kal said. He crossed to the bed and sat down. "The Fleet's out. It just came out. Did you hear?"

PARR felt a shock of surprise. He imagined the hundred powerful ships of the fleet coming, one by one, from the dead isolation of hyperspace. In his mind's eye he could see the faint glimmer of the static shield—the protective aura—form slowly in real space; he could imagine the ships safe within their electric sheaths which caught the hull-wrenching force of transition and dissipated it from the heavy steel plating. He could imagine one ship—perhaps one—popping out, shieldless, battered by the force vortex, and perhaps leaking air or ruptured entirely because the protective aura had collapsed under pressure. Then he saw the ships neatly pulling into formation, grouping for instructions, waiting for the attack signal.

"Day after tomorrow they attack," Kal said.

"They're closer," Parr whispered.

Kal concentrated. "Yeah. I feel them. Come to the window." He stood up and crossed the room in quick cat-like strides.

Parr followed him and the two of them stared down. Perspiration stood on Parr's forehead. After a moment they saw Bertie come out from beneath the hotel awning. He seemed small at a distance, and they saw him toss a cigarette butt carelessly to the sidewalk. He moved leisurely

away from the entrance and leaned against the side of the hotel, one hand in his overcoat pocket.

Kal sneered, "You think they'll drive right up?"

Parr's face twitched. "I don't know . . . if they know there's two of us . . ." He glanced left along the street. "I guess they will. I guess they'll try to come right in after us."

Kal chuckled. "That's good. That's damned good, eh?"

Parr turned to stare at him. "They're strong."

"They won't be looking for Bertie."

"Listen," Parr whispered hoarsely. "They're stronger than we are."

Kal snarled a curse.

"No," Parr said intently. "They are."

"Shut up!"

"Listen," Parr said. "I know. I've . . ."

Kal turned slowly. "They're not stronger. They *couldn't* be stronger. Even if Bertie misses, we'll get them. If they're so strong, why haven't they already carried the fight to us? If they're so strong, they should be ready to attack us, so why don't they?"

He turned back to the window.

"They're almost here," Parr said.

A cab turned the corner. "Feel them center on us?" Parr said, drawing down his shield as tightly as he could.

Kal, tense-faced, nodded.

Parr stared fascinated as the cab screeched to a halt.

Then Parr felt a wave of sickness and uncertainty; he reached out for Kal's elbow. "Wait!" he cried.

But already, below, Bertie jerked into explosive action.

He shot three times. The male Oholo pitched forward to the gutter.

Bertie's gun exploded once more, but the muzzle was aimed into the air. He crumpled slowly, and the gun clinked to the sidewalk from nerveless fingers.

"He got one," Kal said in satisfaction. "The other one must be quicker 'n hell."

Parr let out a tired sigh.

"That's that," Kal said. " . . . I'll be damned, a female Oholo! She won't dare to try two of us alone."

Parr's eyes were fixed below. In what seemed a dream, he watched her get out of the cab. She glanced up and down the street. She looked up, quickly, toward their window. And then she darted across the sidewalk toward the hotel entrance.

"I'll be damned!" Kal cried. "She's coming up anyway!" His eyes sparkled gleefully. He searched his lips with his tongue. "Let's both hit her now! She's near enough!"

"No!" Parr cried sharply. "No! Let her get closer . . . Let's . . . let's make sure we get her."

They could feel her nearing them, not quickly, not slowly, but with measured steps.

CHAPTER IX

SHE was just outside the door and Parr felt something like momentary confusion before the hate came. Yet when it did it was tinged and colored as he thought of her walking toward them, alone. He tried to concentrate on her remembered image, tried to call up the previous hate in all its glory. He could not; instead, even the hate he knew drained away. In its place he felt—not fear exactly—not fear for himself but of the inevitability of death. Not his death—hers.

He saw Kal's lips curl, and then he winced. Fingernails dug into his palms.

And the door opened and she stood before them. There was a breathless instant, absolutely still, while time hung fire. Her eyes were aflame. Eyes, he knew, that were capable of softness as well. Eyes steady, intent, unafraid. He was frozen in delicious surprise that tingled his spine, and he felt his scalp crawl. He also felt deep awe at her courage.

She came into the room, closed the door, stood with her back leaning lightly against it. Her eyes blazed into his.

Her red lips moved delicately. "Hello," she said. "I've been looking for you." She had not glanced at Kal.

"Now!" Kal cried wildly.

Parr wanted to scream something meaningless, but before the sound

could bubble forth the room seemed to erupt into a colored blaze. She had struck at him with a lethal assault!

He reeled, fighting back for his life, conscious now of Kal fighting at his side.

Her eyes were steady, and her face frowned in concentration. She was icy calm in the struggle and there was cold fury in her whips of thought. But slowly, under their resistance, her eyes began to widen in surprise.

For a breath-held moment, even with the two of them against her, the issue seemed in doubt; Kal half crumpled, stunned by a blast of hot thought that seared away his memory for one instant.

She could not turn fast enough to Parr, nor could she, in feinting his automatic attack, strike again at Kal. Then again, the two of them were together, and slowly, very slowly, they hedged her mind between them and shielded it off.

Kal recovered.

Parr gritted his teeth in a mental agony he could not account for and stripped at her outer shield. Kal came in too and the shield began to break.

The Oholo still stood straight and contemptuous in defeat, her eyes calm and deadly as she still struggled against them.

She struck once more with fading strength and Parr caught the thrust and shunted it away. And then he was in her mind.

HE held a stroke that would burn like a sun's core, and almost hurled it. But there was a great calmness before him and he hesitated a fraction of a second in doubt as he stared deep into her glazing eyes. He felt his heart throb in new pain.

Kal struck over him, and the Oholo went limp, suddenly, and sank unconscious to the floor, a pathetic rag doll. A tiny wisp of thought struggled out and faded.

Kal cried in triumph and gathered for the final blow.

Great, helpless rage tore at Parr then, and almost before he realized it he sent a powerful blast into Kal's relaxing shield. Kal rocked to his heels, dazed, and his left hand went to his eyes. He whirled, lax mouthed, surprised.

"What . . . ?"

"She's mine!" Parr screamed wildly, "She's mine!"

"The hell —"

In fury Parr slapped the other Knoug a stinging blow across the mouth. "Get out! Get out! Get out or I'll kill you!"

Kal's eyes glazed in surprise.

Parr was panting. "I'll finish her," he gasped. "Now get out!"

Kal's eyes met his for a moment but they could not face the anger in Parr's.

"Get out or I'll kill you!" Parr said levelly, his mind a welter of emotions that he could not sort out and recognize.

Kal rubbed his cheek slowly.

"Okay," he said hoarsely. "Okay."

Parr let breath out through his teeth. "Hurry!"

Kal's lips curled. His shoulders hunched and he seemed about to charge. But Parr relaxed, for he saw fear in the Knoug's eyes. Kal straightened. He shrugged his shoulders indifferently, spat on the carpet without looking at Parr and stepped over the unconscious Oholo. He jerked the door open and without looking back slammed it behind him.

Parr was trembling and suddenly emotionally exhausted.

PARR'S knees were water. He stared fascinated at the fallen Oholo. He sank to the bed. He let his thoughts touch her unconscious mind as it lay exposed and helpless, and he wondered why he did not strike the death blow. He tried to think of stripping her mind away slowly, layer by layer, until she lay a helpless babbling infant, her body weak and pliant to his revenge. But he thought of her clear eyes and he was sickened and ashamed.

He called up memories of Oholos—the captured few—and now for the first time he knew general respect rather than hate. And thinking of Knougs, he writhed.

Yet he was conditioned to hate and he was conditioned to kill. He must kill, for the conditioning was strong. He tried to fight down the revolt of his thoughts, and, in recognizing the revolt at last, knowledge came. The guilt of treason. Not

for any act. His treason was doubt, and doubt was weakness, and weakness was death. He could not be weak for the weak are destroyed. But he seemed, for a heart beat, to see through the fabric of Empire which was not strength at all. No he thought, I've believed too long. It's in my blood. There's nothing else.

He went to the wash basin and drew a glass of water. He carried it to the Oholo, knelt by her head and bathed her temple with his dampened handkerchief until she moaned and threw an arm weakly over her forehead. Her hand met his, squeezed, relaxed, and was limp again.

He carried her to the bed and sat beside her, staring at her clear face, which was an Earthface. (I've been in this body too long, he thought, I'm beginning to think all wrong.) For the face was not without beauty for him.

He shook his head dazedly, trying to understand himself.

(Here is the enemy, he thought. How do I know? I have been told ever since I can remember. But is it true? Does saying it make it true? But what else can I believe? One must believe something!)

SHE opened her eyes, stared at him uncomprehending. He waited patiently as she gathered her loose thoughts and tied them down. She smiled uncertainly, not yet recognizing him.

Finally he could see understand-

ing in her eyes.

"Your mind is too weak to fight," he said. "If you try to shield I will kill you."

Her lips curled. "What do you want?"

"Don't try to shield," he warned. He studied her face and his chest was tight. He looked away from her face.

"I've got to ask you some questions," he said. "After that, I'm going to kill you."

There was no fear in Lauri's eyes. "Go ahead," she said calmly. "Kill me."

"I . . . I . . . want to ask you something first," he said. "I've got to ask you some questions."

Her lips glistened and he felt sympathy that he could not understand. And seeing her frown, he shielded the thoughts from her.

"You're not . . . quite like I thought you were," she said, very calmly.

"I am!" he snarled. "I am what you thought!" He was ashamed of the sympathy he had let her sense, and then he was ashamed of being ashamed, and his mind was confusion.

"Why did you—did you leave this planet as an unprotected flank, like this?" he said. It was a question, he knew, that had to be answered, before . . . before . . . what?

"They weren't ready to join us," she said.

"What do you mean?"

"They were not developed enough

to join us," she said.

"Why didn't you conquer them!" he insisted. "You were strong enough. Why didn't you conquer them?"

She said: "We couldn't do that. We don't have any right to do that."

In that instant, it all became clear. Suddenly truth overwhelmed him, wave after wave, like a sickness. "No!" he cried. "No!" He dropped his head into his hands. "Lies," he murmured. "Lies, lies, lies!" He saw the wrongness, the terrible wrongness, and he searched desperately over his life for repudiation, an excuse. But he found none.

They had come to him and said, This is the law of life. And they took him and trained him, and showed him nothing else. He had been scarcely a child at the first school of soldiery, and they had fashioned his mind, a pliant mind, and ground doubts out (if there had been any.) They told him that the law was strength, and strength was destiny, and destiny was to rule those below, obey those above, and destroy those who did not agree. There were no friends and enemies—only the rulers and the ruled. And the ruler must expand or die of admitted weakness.

"It's all lies!" he said. He felt the crumbling away of the certainty he had lived by. And before the helpless Oholo he felt weak and defeated and suddenly he realized that his mind shield was down.

She reached out gently to touch him.

Below, a police siren wailed in the streets. A car for corpses.

HE tried to shake the hand away. "They lied," he said. "They lied about everything. They lied that you were ready to conquer us. They told us you were cowardly and would kill us if we did not kill you first, and that we must take . . ."

She said: "It was worse than we thought. We did not think you were strong enough to attack us. Not here. We thought if we let you alone you would collapse of your own weight."

"I never knew," he said. "There wasn't any way to know. You have to do what everyone else does. You get to think they must be right." He made a small sound. "When I first came here—it started to bother me, when I saw the planet was unprotected—when I saw how strong you were . . . But I had so many things to do. I was too busy to think. But I felt something at the very first about your presence here . . ."

She stirred restlessly on the bed. He knew that he was defenseless before her because she had recovered, but she did not strike out. "Trying to help them," she said. "A few of us came to help them. They needed us. We were trying to prevent a war. And a few more years—if we'd . . . but that's gone now. You'll destroy it all."

He stood from the bed and it creaked.

"We were slowly changing their governments," she said. "We would have succeeded." He felt her mind slowly gather, and there was infinite bitterness, and he tensed. But still she did not strike at him.

"I want you to go," Parr said. "Before the other Knoug comes back. Get out."

Words damned up inside him. He had been trained to hate and trained to kill. The emotions were loose now. There was no outlet for them. He was frustrated and enraged. Hate bubbled about in him, fermenting. He had been trained to hate and to kill. Lauri winced as she felt the turmoil. "Get out!" he screamed.

The door crashed open.

Three figures lunged through.

"Lauri, thank God!" one of them cried. "We thought he'd killed you."

Parr suddenly found his arms held by two Oholos.

"We got here as soon as we could pick up your thoughts."

Lauri said, "Jen is already dead."

One of the Oholos slapped Parr's face savagely. "We'll kill this one for that!" he snarled.

LAURI sprang from the bed and sent the weapon spinning from the hand of the leader of the three Oholos. He gave a startled gasp. The weapon hit the carpet and slammed to rest against the far wall. "Don't!" she cried.

"You're crazy!" the leader snarled. "What's wrong with you?"

"He saved my life," Lauri said,

panting.

"He's Knoug," the leader sneered. "You know damned well he was trying to use you for something or other."

Parr stared, fascinated. He was surprised to find that he was not afraid. The shock of capture had not yet passed, and he seemed to be watching a drama from which he was removed.

"No!" Lauri said. "No, he wasn't!"

"How can you say that, Lauri? Look what he's done! Look what he's already done!"

"Unshield, Parr, show them," Lauri commanded.

Parr hesitated, trying to divine the plot and see what was required of him.

"It's a trick," the leader said. "They've got some way to fool us, even with an open mind!"

Lauri's eyes were wide.

The leader jerked his hand. "Kill him," he instructed.

The Oholo on Parr's left released Parr's arm and reached inside his coat for a weapon.

Lauri darted across the room and pounced on the weapon lying at the base of the wall. She seized it and rolled over. She aimed it steadily at the Oholo on Parr's left. "Don't do that," she said. "Let him go." She got to one knee.

PARR felt the grip ease on his right arm. He stood free. And for the first time—with strange hope

—the feeling of unreality vanished.

"You're insane!" the Oholo on Parr's right rasped.

She jerked the muzzle of the weapon. "I told you. He saved my life. He could have killed me. He didn't."

"A trick!"

"Get away from him!"

Reluctantly the two stood back, and the leader shifted uneasily on his feet.

"Don't you try it," Lauri suggested. "For all you know, I might really shoot. You aren't that quick."

Parr let out his breath.

"You!" she snapped at him. "Get to the door!"

Dazed, he obeyed her. He shook his head to clear it. He was afraid they would try to stop him.

"Open it!"

He opened the door and hesitated, looking at her.

"I'm coming," she snapped. Still covering the three Oholos she got to her feet and began to back toward him. "Don't follow," she warned the three before her.

"You know what this means?" the leader said. "You know what it means to help the enemy?"

"Go on out," she told Parr. "He saved my life," she said doggedly.

He obeyed. She followed him. She fumbled for the door knob, found it. "Run!" she cried. She slammed the door.

They ran desperately for the stairs. Their feet pounded on the soft carpet as they clattered down.

She was almost abreast of him.

"Help me!" she cried when they passed the first landing.

And a moment later Parr knew what she meant. They were trying to tear into his mind, and she was holding them off with her own shield. He joined her as well as he could, marveling at the vast strength she had recovered.

"Hurry!" she cried. "I can't hold it much longer." She lurched into him and he put an arm around her waist.

AND then they were through the lobby and into the silent street. No curious spectators were lingering to stare at the drying patch of dirty brown in the gutter beyond the awning.

"This way!" she cried.

As they fled on the pressure weakened. She was running fleetly at his side now, her brow unfurrowed, and yet he knew that she was still holding the shield under terrific pressure.

"In here," she gasped, suddenly turning into a narrow alleyway. "Stop!" she said. She half dragged him down to the pavement behind a row of packing crates.

"They'll be right after us!" he panted.

"No. Listen. Follow my lead. I think I can blanket us, if you help me."

Parr felt the warmth of her thoughts around him, and then they began to go up beyond his range

and he had to strain to stay with them. Underneath her thoughts his mind began to quiet, and, in a moment he felt—isolation.

"Help, here," she said.

He saw the weakness and strengthened it. With her helping, he found the range less high, and he could almost relax under it. And their minds were very close together, and their thoughts were completely alone. "We're safe here," she whispered.

He listened to his own far away breathing, and heard hers, too, softer but labored.

They crouched, waiting, and the street before them was quiet in the sunlight, for the mail trucks were out, and no taxis moved. The city—for the moment—was deathly still and waiting uneasily. The high air was sharp in his lungs.

"They've missed us," she said at length. "Wait! They're . . . They're after . . . it's another Knoug. They think we've separated, and they think it's you."

"That would be Kal," Parr said. "He must have been waiting nearby." He brought out the comset. "He must have seen us come out together."

He flicked open the comset, heard, " . . . joined with the Oholos. Parr and the other just left the hotel together."

"He's told the Advanceship," Parr said to the girl.

"It doesn't make any difference," Lauri replied wearily.

And Parr breathed a nervous sigh,

for the hate had found its channel. The Empire had made him unclean and debased him, and he had to cleanse himself. His vast reserve of hate shrieked out against the Empire; their own weapon turned against them.

"I'd like to get back to the Advanceship," Parr said. "If I could get back, I could smash in their faces!"

"Oh," she said.

THE comset sputtered excitedly. "Three Oholos after me! They're armed! Must be new ones. The other two weren't armed!"

The comset was silent.

"Three?" Parr said. "That's right, there were three. I thought there were just five on the whole planet."

"There's about fifty now. They landed last night. Out in the Arizona desert. They're the only ones who could get here in time."

Parr felt elation. But it passed. "Fifty . . . That's not enough to stop the invasion."

"It's all we could get here," Lauri repeated.

Parr groaned. "The Knougs will shield the planet tomorrow. It will trap those fifty on the surface. And us. They'll shoot us, if we're lucky. But I'd like to kill some first!"

The comset crackled, and the Ship voice said: "How many new ones altogether?"

"I don't know," Kal answered. "I only know of three."

"We'll hurry the attack, then, be-

fore they're set. Can you hold out, Kal?"

"I don't know," Kal said.

The attack. The meaning of it suddenly rang in Parr's ears. Until a second ago, he had seen his hate as personal, and now he realized that the Empire was ready to capture a planet and then to destroy a System. And he saw the vast evil of the Empire hurtling toward Oholo civilization. He gnashed his teeth.

Lauri's hand jerked on Parr's elbow. "The one you call Kal is dead."

"I'm glad," Parr was grim. He remembered the savage eyes which the Earth disguise could not conceal. "I'm glad."

"Kal, Kal," the Advanceship called into emptiness. "Kal! Come in, advanceman Kal!"

Parr flipped off the cornset.

She lowered the thought blanket completely. "Relax. Try to relax."

"Why did you do it?" he said. "Why didn't you let them kill me?"

"I don't know," she said slowly. "You saved my life. I couldn't let them kill you. I saw how you felt, how you suddenly changed. How you'd become a new person all at once. I couldn't pass judgment on you after that. I hated you and then I didn't hate you anymore. It doesn't matter. It's too late to matter. I . . . I . . ."

Her mind was warm against his.

"They're going back to join the others in the desert now," she said. "They're going to get ready to fight

the attack."

"Lauri," Parr said. "Lauri, I've got to do something!"

CHAPTER X

(New York had broken windows now, and the streets were glass littered. An occasional white face peered out suspiciously from above a ground floor. But the heart beat of subways was stilled. The cry had been: "You'll *starve* in the City!" and there had been an hysterical exodus, slow at first and then faster and faster and faster. The moon marched her train of shadows in the cavern streets.)

In Denver, the moon rode the mountains, calm, misted, serene.

"Parr," he spoke into the comset, and he felt Lauri's hand tighten on his elbow.

He glanced nervously at the sky. He was afraid to see the planet shield blossom as it might any minute to signify the attack had begun. But he feared even worse the absence of it.

"Parr?" the Advanceship spat back.

"The Oholos have a defense system around their own planets. *It won't do you any good to capture this one!* You won't be able to get nearer!"

"You are guilty of treason, Parr!"

"You can't get at their inner system! They have a defense ring that can blast your Fleet out of space."

"Lies!"

Parr glanced at Lauri beside him in the darkness. "No!" he said. "They are stronger than you are!"

"They would have attacked us if they were," the Knoug said calmly.

"They don't think like that!"

"A poor bluff, Parr."

"Stop!" Parr said, "Listen . . ." He looked at Lauri again. "No use. They cut off."

"I didn't think they'd bluff," Lauri said. She looked across the street. The street lights had come on on schedule, but they soon flickered out as the power supply waned. The city was dark.

"Will they scorch the planet?"

PARR glanced once more at the sky. "I think they're holding off trying to gain new information on your Oholos. Or maybe they're having trouble getting ready. We'll know very soon whether they'll scorch it or assault it with an occupation force."

Lauri said, "You tried."

"If we could *convince* them, like I was convinced . . . if we could show them you *were* strong and peaceful . . ."

"But we aren't strong, Parr. They caught us unprepared. If we had a year or two . . ."

"How long would it be before you could get reinforcements here?"

Lauri bit her lower lip. "At least a month. We'd have to organize the units and everything. No sooner."

"Oh."

"What were you thinking?"

"I thought," Parr said. ". . . I thought I might hold the attack off . . . for as much as a couple of hours."

"That wouldn't help."

Parr swallowed and cleared his throat nervously. "I don't know. Maybe it would give the Oholos more time to prepare. It might help a little."

"How?"

"I'm going to try that. I've got to do something, Lauri."

He flipped open the comset and started to speak, but the channel was already busy. It was filled with crackling explosive Knoug language.

Parr began to listen intently.

It was a conversation between the Flagship and one of the other ships of the Fleet. ". . . Parr's right," the other ship said. "So they're down there. They say they've fought Oholos, and he's probably right . . ."

"How many are there?" the Flagship demanded.

"Thirteen. All in the engine room."

"Tell them Parr was bluffing," the Flagship ordered.

"I already did."

"Tell them they're guilty of mutiny!"

"I did, and they still won't come out. They're the bunch that were in the assault at Coly. They've been hard to handle ever since."

"All right. Go after them with guns . . ."

"What is it?" Lauri asked.

"Shhhh!" Parr cautioned.

A third circuit opened. "No other

ship reports trouble. It's just this one bunch."

THERE was a harsh curse, guttural and nasty. "These channels are open! The whole Fleet knows about that Coly bunch now!"

"What in hell! *God damn it, get them off!* We've got to isolate . . ." Click.

Parr stared at the comset in his hand.

Parr smiled thinly. "I did a little good, at least. A bunch of veterans must have been listening in on me . . . One of the Fleet ships has a little trouble."

"Maybe . . .," she began excitedly.

"No," Parr said. "It was only thirteen Knougs. It's scarcely a ripple. It might make the rest of the Fleet a little uneasy—but they'll still take orders. I'm sorry Lauri, but it's not going to help much."

"How do you know it won't?" she insisted.

The bitter smile was still there. "I've seen something like it before. In five minutes it will all be over."

"Oh."

"Well," he said after a moment, "I better try to get the Ship. I'm going to hold them off as long as I can."

He clicked open the comset again. "Kal," he lied icily. "Advanceman Kal." For the first time he was glad of the tinny, voice disguising diaphragm.

"Get off!" the Advanceship order-

ed. "This is the Commander. We're under communication security, damn it!"

PARR nodded to himself in recognition of what had happened. Commanders were now on the whole communications network. It would prevent ordinary operators from spreading more news of mutiny through the Fleet; it would blanket the manufacturing of rumors. And, if things were running true to course the Flagship was monitoring all channels just in case.

"I've found out the Oholo's disposition," Parr hissed into the tiny comset. "Can you pick me up?"

There was a momentary pause.

" . . . We thought you were dead, Kal. Why didn't you answer our calls?"

" . . . Broke my comset," Parr lied quickly. "I've just killed the traitor, Parr, and I'm using his."

There seemed to be suspended judgment in the Ship.

"If you pick me up, I can give you details. But you'll have to hurry! Two Oholos are closing in right now!"

"How many are there altogether?"

Parr hesitated. "Only twenty, Parr said. I think less than that. It won't be necessary to scorch the planet."

Again silence. Then the Flagship itself cut in, "All right. We'll pick you up. Where are you?"

"Denver." He made out the street signs in the darkness. "I'm here at a street corner. Eighteenth and Lari-

mer."

"Someone who knows the territory from the Advancement can pick you up. Ten minutes. Hold on."

"Hurry!" Parr pleaded.

He cut off the comset. He realized he was frightened. The night was growing cold and he took two deep breaths. He let the comset slip from his fingers and shatter on the pavement. He kicked it away in savage annoyance, and snarled a curse.

Lauri shuddered inwardly at his violence, but he did not notice. And she forced a smile and touched him with a warm thought.

"I told them I was Kal," he said. "I . . . asked them to pick me up."

Lauri half gasped in surprise.

"They'll hold off the attack until they hear from me again. I'll try to keep them guessing as long as I can."

He was tired. He and Lauri had been walking the streets aimlessly for hours. At first there had been mobs after the mail delivery. Then the governor, conscious of what had happened in some Eastern cities, had declared martial law and only soldiers were supposed to be on the streets after sundown curfew. Already many people had fled the city in terror.

As he and Lauri walked side by side, Parr felt he had come to know her better than he had ever known anyone. He realized how strong his mind had grown under its month long test, and he knew

that she had come to respect his strength, she who was so strong herself. But it was not her strength he respected. Strangely, it was her weakness—her compassion and her ability to forgive. An unknown thing, forgiveness, a beautiful thing.

She stood silently beside him. Then she said, "What time you gain won't matter."

"Maybe it will!" he said harshly, hating the Empire.

She stared into his face. She shook her head. "No," she said. She touched his cheek. "I ought to say something."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. That it's a brave thing you want to do . . ."

"After what I've done, I've got to do something to make up for my life."

"What you did doesn't matter anymore."

"Listen," he said. "Listen, Lauri. You better leave. Don't stand here any longer."

She did not move.

He gritted his teeth. "Hurry up!"

Her mind touched his gently, cloudlike, and drew away. "Let me go with you."

"You know that wouldn't work."

After a minute she turned reluctantly.

"Wait!" he cried after she had gone only a few steps.

Eagerly she turned.

"Listen!" He glanced at his watch. "Listen. The Fleet is nervous. The Knougs are nervous. It might not

take much after that Coly bunch revolted . . . They're yellow inside, and the seeds of doubt are there. If we could just make them believe you really had a weapon. An hour from now—give me *one hour*—you're to contact the Fleet on my comset and tell them the Oholos are going to destroy their Advanceship right before their eyes. Then tell them to get out, the whole Fleet, or you'll destroy every ship. That may make them think! That may make them believe!"

"But unless the Ship really is destroyed before their eyes . . ."

"I'll take it into hyperspace without a shield. One minute it will be there, the next minute it won't. Maybe they won't stop to figure it out."

"But you'll be killed!"

"**G**IVE me just one hour. Go on, damn it. Don't argue!" She seemed ready to cry. Then she bit her lip.

"But—Parr! Parr! I *can't*! How can I? *You broke the comset!*"

Parr's mind was dazed. He tried to think. ". . . Listen. Find the one Kal had! See if you can find that! You've *got to*, Lauri. It all depends on that. You've just got to find it!"

She hesitated.

"Don't argue," he insisted. "Hurry! They'll be after me any minute."

She seemed to want to say something.

"Run!" he cried. And then she was hurrying away and her mind left

his entirely, so there would be no danger of detection when the scout ship came for him. And then she turned a corner, and was gone . . .

THE silver saucer shaped scout ship zipped down the street, banked sharply and vanished, recording (Parr knew) electronic details for its mothership, the pick-up craft.

Parr waited, his mouth dry.

Finally—after what seemed a long time—he saw the dark, moving patch return. It lowered, and Parr could make out the details of the unlighted surface. He sighed with relief. Fortunately it was the small three passenger craft.

It hovered, closed on the intersection and settled. Hoping that neither of its crew knew him by sight, Parr sprinted from the shadows of the building to the opening door.

The distance seemed to unravel before his feet, lengthening like a magic carpet.

His feet hit the edge of the door almost together and grasping the sides he pulled himself in, falling forward and gasping for the crew's benefit, "Oholos!"

The inside of the craft, operating under low flying procedure, was darkened except for the dull orange of the instruments.

"Up!" Parr cried in Knoug, and the craft shot away pressing him to the floor even though the acceleration compensator was whirring in his ears.

He groaned and stiffened, anticipating the light when they were in second procedure level.

He heard one of the crew say: "Pick-up successful."

"Can you berth your craft on the Flagship?"

PARR felt a dread for he had thought to go to the Advancement, and that was the one Lauri would name for destruction!

Relief came when the crewman said, "Wrong hanger sort. This isn't combat equipment, sorry."

"All right."

Parr breathed an easier sigh, and the communications set went off.

The lights came on.

Instinctively Parr lowered his head into his arms. He groaned again. "My leg," he mumbled.

"What?"

"Hurt my leg," he lied.

A crewman knelt beside him. Parr realized then that they were carrying an extra crewman.

The Knoug rolled him over.

There was a startled gasp of recognition and Parr hit him in the neck. He slumped down and Parr had to squirm from under his limp body.

"What the —!"

Parr was on his feet.

"That's not Kal!" one of the others said.

The pilot swiveled around.

Parr dove, realizing, even as he was in the air, that each Knoug was reaching for his focus gun.

He hit the standing Knoug. The Knoug teetered. Parr hit him again.

The pilot had his gun out.

Parr slammed a mental bolt at the pilot and he was surprised to see that the shield folded like hot butter. Even had he wished to he could not have stopped his assault from crisping the other's thoughts to oblivion. He was almost annoyed at the weakness.

He tried a mental assault at the other sagging crewman with equal results.

The craft started to spin out of control.

Parr struggled forward, was slammed sideways, and far below he could see moonlight flash on water.

He was thrown into the controls on the second spin, and he pulled back the emergency equalizer in desperation. The craft skittered.

And then he was in control.

He found the beam on the dial. He was to the left. He centered on it and followed it in.

He jockeyed below the gaping hatch of the Advancement and came up slowly. The controls were stiff. It was a ticklish job.

Then he was inside. He shied left to set the craft down.

It bounced and half rolled on the deck. Then he struggled to the door.

When he opened it there was an orderly waiting. "That was a hell of a landing," he said. "For—hey!"

He went down easily under the assault. Parr realized his mind had grown even stronger than he had

supposed. For the first time he began to hope that he really stood a chance of making it.

He glanced at his watch.

Almost forty-five minutes! It had seemed only five . . .

LAURI ran toward the second building. Her mind usually smooth and calm, was now a welter of conflicting thoughts. She had tried to reach the other Oholos. But they shut themselves off. No help from them.

There were no cabs out. And the telephones were dead. She was desperately afraid Kal was in the morgue but she could not risk the time to be sure. Vaguely she remembered the siren that had squalled when the police came for the body of the Oholo and his Earth assailant who had been killed outside the hotel. But she could not remember another siren near the time Kal had been killed. She was forced to assume the police had not come for him.

But she could not be sure.

If the police had not come, she reasoned, then he had not been killed before witnesses. Therefore he had not been killed in the streets.

She knew that he had seen them leave the hotel. That narrowed the range. That he had been killed shortly afterward by the Oholos narrowed the range even more.

He had not been moving when he was killed, and he had just finished reporting Parr's and her flight, meaning that he had been stationary since

his observation. And there would be no reason for the Oholos to move or to hide the body.

Therefore his body should be where it had fallen.

There had been four business buildings in the vicinity where a man could have been killed unseen.

She pushed open the doors to the second. The ground floor, within observation range, was easily checked. So was the second. Third. Fourth. Fifth.

She was back in the street. Two more buildings. Half her time gone. She glanced at her watch for verification. Each of the two remaining buildings had four floors.

The nearest one was locked. But there was a light inside. She was puzzled. Then she saw the cleaning maid come down the front stairs, carrying a brace of candles in one hand and a mop and bucket in the other. The old woman moved slowly, unconcerned, oblivious of the outside world, intent only on her job. Lauri shuddered, but she knew that the face would not be calm if she had seen a corpse in her duties. Therefore, there was no corpse inside.

One building left!

But a few minutes later she was back in the streets. There had been nothing on the lower floor, the second floor, and the two top floors needed only a glance.

She sobbed desperately.

Something had been wrong with her reasoning, and she had only

twenty minutes left to start from the beginning and find the Knoug's body.

PARR ran quickly along the corridor. He passed two incurious Knougs. He continued on, winding upward toward the control room which he had to capture. There would be a delicate balance of timing and luck between success and failure.

He was not frightened now, even though he knew he could not personally win the fight in capture or success. His mind was calm. Strangely, too, it was at peace.

He clambered up the final ladder, his hands unsteady on the rungs. The control room door was closed. He tensed, listening, wondering how many of the enemy were inside.

He knocked, his knuckles brittle on steel. He thought, in that fleet second, of Lauri. He wondered dimly if she had found the comset.

"Yeah?"

"I've got Kal out here, sir!" Parr said briskly, hoping to imitate the orderly's voice.

"What the hell!" a voice from inside roared, "I thought we told you to take him down to the Commander's office."

Parr held his breath.

He heard an indistinct mutter of voices inside and he knew that one of them must be on the inter-phone to the Commander.

"Something screwy here!" the voice roared indignantly.

Parr hit the door and it crashed

inward with an echoing clang.

He catapulted into the congested control room. In a glance he saw there were only two Knougs. One was at the control banks, half turned in surprise. The other held the phone limply in his left hand, his eyes staring.

Parr kicked the door shut viciously and the sound rang in his ears. He launched himself at the Knoug with the phone. He felt his head meet a soft stomach and he heard explosive air pop from the man's lungs. The Knoug went over backwards, down hard.

The other one roared an oath.

PARR walked on the fallen one's face. He stomped the face and it gurgled. He stomped again in fury as all his frustration and new bitterness found an outlet. He locked the other Knoug in mental battle, but the mind he met was strong, catching him off guard.

The Knoug dove for the huge comset to warn the Fleet.

Parr could hear, from the receiver of the dangling phone, the Commander saying over and over again, "What the hell's going on? What the hell's going on?"

Parr brought the remaining Knoug to his knees with a mental assault.

Parr backed toward the door. As he fought mentally, he managed to slide the force bar across it. They'd play hell getting him out, at least.

His enemy was down, quivering. Parr panted desperately, and then

from beyond the door, he felt the growth of mental assault force. Three minds hurrying toward him! Two more minds came in and he staggered and almost fell.

Then he was down, as if from a hammer blow to the chin. He fought, sickened. He began to crawl toward the control board. And fighting, he struggled up, as if under a great weight. New minds came in. And still he could fight. But he was almost down again.

(Five minutes, he thought.)

He found the right lever, pulled.

There was the crackle of the heterodyne mind shield. And the control room was isolated by a high, shrill whine. He winced, recovering, and smiled inwardly at the careful devices Knoug officers had to protect themselves against a mutinous crew.

He dampened all the thrust engines with three hacking strokes at knife switches, being careful to get the right ones. He ripped out the engine room control. The Advancement was dead in space for at least an hour.

HE staggered to the comset. He stumbled over the dead Knoug and kicked the body. He shattered the transmitter with a furious blow.

With fumbling fingers he ripped away the seal the Commander had placed on the receiver. He snapped the volume control to the right. The radio whined.

Someone was trying to call the Ad-

vancement, and Parr smiled grimly.

Another circuit broke in on the call. "Their commander is questioning the advancement they brought up, I imagine. Let him go. The information we got from the Texas advancement supercedes it anyway."

Parr cursed monotonously.

"Forward bank in!" another circuit reported.

"Nine stations on planet shield. Ready?"

There was a crackling of readiness.

"We'll hit before it. Try to get it set in fifteen minutes."

"In position, there. Eight, back a little."

"Clear hulls. Unscreen."

"Check . . . Check . . ."

Parr glanced at his watch. The hour had only minutes of life. What was wrong with Lauri?

"Ready around?"

The Fleet was getting ready to move. Parr screamed in wild frustration.

At the door, the force field was beginning to show strain. Outside they had a huge force director focused on it. Parr speculated idly how they had managed to get it up from the engine room so quickly. The force field at the door began to peel. In a few minutes it would shatter and the control room would be an inferno with every switch and bit of metal melted into smoking blobs.

SHE was searching the shops, kicking in glass, when necessary to gain entrance. She was listening, now,

and time dribbled away. Standing amid broken glass, she cocked her head hoping to hear the whisper of the still active comset.

Ten minutes.

What had been wrong with her logic? Why hadn't Kal's body been in one of the four buildings? Even as she searched on she reviewed it in her mind, until suddenly, with an abrupt snap she knew that she had overlooked one. There were not four possible buildings but five.

Kal might have been hiding in the hotel itself!

Nine minutes.

And how many front rooms were in the hotel? A twelve storied welter of windows, and he might be behind any one.

Nine minutes.

Automatically she was running for the hotel.

(Not the lower floors, she thought, or the Oholos would have had him sooner. They must have come down and then gone back up or else the whole time element was wrong.)

One of the upper floors then?

She would have to chance that.

She was in the deserted lobby. As she ran across it she marveled at the panic of a few hours ago. She saw a busy looter in the shadows, and there were not, certainly enough soldiers to be everywhere.

In her headlong rush she did not see the human form on the second landing before she crashed into him. She gasped as the breath went out of her lungs.

The man reached out for her. "What happened?" His voice was desperate. "I've been asleep, and all of a sudden, when I wake up—"

"Let me go!"

"What happened?" he said pathetically. "The city's so *still*."

She pushed him back and continued up the stairs.

He ran after her. "Wait!"

At the top floor she saw no exit to the roof.

The corridor was "U" shaped, the bottom of the "U" facing onto the street. Six rooms on it.

"Young lady!" the man cried, rounding the corner of the stairs below her. She dropped her mental range into a low register and struck toward him. But she could not quite find his range and he shook his head and continued up the stairs. She waited, and when he arrived, she said, "Sorry," and hit him on the chin. He rolled halfway down the short flight of stairs.

She searched the six rooms. All were unlocked and empty, and the doors slammed in her wake.

Nothing.

She gritted her teeth and headed for the stairs and the next floor below.

PARR shattered the glass from the emergency deep space suit. He ripped the suit from the hangar and struggled into it with anxious fingers.

It was a minute after the hour.

He hesitated, holding the helmet in his hands.

The force field at the door was nearly gone. The radic crackled with Knoug attack orders.

And then—with infinite relief—he heard her voice, crackling over the other voices. She sounded short of breath and excited.

"What's that?" someone roared in Knoug, and Parr realized they did not understand English, the common language they had used on the planet.

"Idiots!" Parr shrieked. "Fools! Can't *any* of you understand!"

"I'm going to destroy your Advanceship," Lauri said breathlessly. "I am an Oholo. I'm . . ."

Suddenly a Knoug was translating her message.

Last minute instructions to the Fleet ceased.

"I'm going to destroy your Advanceship," she said again. And then, after a breath, she said, "Be careful! Be careful!" And he knew that the last was not to them but to him.

He could wait no longer. The force field was seconds thin. His mind cried desperately, "Hurry!" He clamped down the he met and all sound vanished.

But her words rang in his mind, "Be careful!" and he was grateful for them. They choked in his throat.

Then he threw the Advanceship into hyperspace.

THERE was a pinwheel of motion that slammed him into the control panel. He could not hear, but everywhere, around him, metal

screamed and wrenched and tore.

The force director beyond the door spun loose and sprayed the Knougs around it, and they vanished. It jerked its current cable and was still. A vast rent in the hull let the air whoosh out into hyperspace, and the Knougs all over the Ship puffed and exploded.

Parr came slowly to his senses. He staggered directionless around the control room. Everything was a shambles.

After a while—nearly an hour had elapsed—he was wandering through silent corridors. It was hot inside his suit.

He found the pick-up ships eventually, but they were ripped from their moorings. One seemed upright and serviceable. He tested the motor. The motor worked. He got out and struggled with the escape hatch. Finally it came loose.

He taxied the pick-up ship out of the mother ship.

Hyperspace was grey and hideous. Here and there lights flashed. The vast, battered derelict of the Advanceship lay below him. Hyperspace spread away. He blasted further from the gutted hull and brought up the space shield of his craft. It wavered around him. Behind him the tortured Advanceship exploded.

He hit back toward real space. The craft skittered under his hands as he wrenched at the controls. The motor was strong, but its delicate shielding apparatus had been damaged and there was a sickening jolt.

The shield was off and Parr was falling, down, down, down, and lights in his head exploded.

And he thought it was infinitely sad that he had done something decent for the first time and now he was to be punished for all the rest. Then he knew no more . . .

THE comset had erupted into a babble of incredible confusion after her message. She waited leadenly. She warned the Fleet once more. "If you do not leave at once, we Oholos will destroy your whole Fleet." She had no way of knowing what was happening.

The Knoug commanders, unnerved, cried among themselves:

"No weapon I ever heard of could do *that*!"

"The advanceman was right! They can destroy us!"

"I say we don't stand a chance!"

"Did you hear? It just *vanished*."

"I'm going to order my ship back."

"I've already shielded for hyperspace."

"What's the Flagship say?"

"What's the Flagship say?"

"Commander Cei just pulled out. That makes five."

"As for me, I say, Let's go!"

"*The Flagship has already got its hyperspace shield turned on!*"

Slowly the voices died away. The comset was silent in Lauri's hand, and she knew that the Fleet had gone. The Advanceship was destroyed.

Remembering Parr, she bowed her

head. She saw the body of Kal lying at her feet, where she had found it in the second room on the tenth floor. And she was crying without sound.

CHAPTER XI

SHE finally got through to the other Oholos. They listened, because the expected attack had not come.

They came for her and she met their airship in the street. They soared above the silent city of Denver.

"A Knoug!" one said. "Who ever would have thought a Knoug would do that!"

She tried to explain but they did not listen for they were busy with other thoughts. She was still crying, but inwardly now. She said, "Don't you see what he might have *become* within a few years?"

"Imagine hitting hyperspace without a shield," one Oholo said.

"It must have turned the ship inside out!"

"So the Knougs actually believed it was a weapon that did it!" another said, pleased.

Lauri said, woodenly, "He was very strong. He was almost as strong as I am. He would have become even stronger."

"There's no Knoug as strong as one of our best workers, Lauri."

"He was more than a Knoug," she insisted gently. "A Knoug would have just—just gone on being what he was."

She fell silent, remembering.

"It played hell with this planet," an Oholo said. "It'll take years to straighten it out."

"Not years," another said, looking down at the night. "No. I think not years. One of the governments we were primarily concerned with has been changed. The people finally got the chance to overthrow it, and they did. That's a good sign. I think our work will be easier now. It's always easier to rebuild than to change."

Lauri!

She froze. "Listen!"

And they listened, high up.

Lauri!

"Yes!" she cried.

Come to me!

She rushed to the pilot room. She took the controls and spun the ship.

"Did you hear that?" an Oholo said, awed.

"Yes," said another. "... He not only went in unshielded, but he managed to get back!"

They shook their heads.

And within fifteen minutes she had found his ship, lying below in dying moonlight.

SHE brought the aircraft down and within seconds she was running to the wreckage and pulling his limp body from it.

When the space helmet was off his

head, he gasped, "Tore hell out of my big ship. And . . . then I even . . . up and . . . wrecked this one, landing . . . I'm just . . . damned clumsy."

"Get the surgeon!" Lauri cried.

She held his head in her arms while her lips moved soundlessly. Then she bent to kiss him on the mouth after the Earth fashion, and Parr had never experienced such a sensation of trust and surrender and promise. He let his hand move gently down her arm.

"We'll stay here," she whispered. "We'll stay here and help these Earth people, you and I. You'd like that? To help them?"

"Yes," he said. "It would be nice to . . . build instead of destroy. It would be nice, I think. You and I could help them. I'd like that."

The surgeon came, and they took Parr out of the suit and after a while the surgeon said, "I don't know much about Knougs. But I'm glad this one is going to be all right."

Lauri laughed hysterically. The tears were open again. "I couldn't kill him," she sobbed.

The other Oholos looked puzzled and polite.

"It's a joke!" she said, dizzy with relief. "Of course he'll live, because even I couldn't kill him!"

Parr smiled up at her.

THE END

IMPORTANT! Special Announcement on Page 162!

THE EDITORIAL

(Concluded from page 5)

ONE thing we would like to stress right now in relation to the coming convention. This is not going to be a party for just organized fandom, the writers, editors, and artists. Of course they will be there, having a great time as always, but we want *you* to be there. This is going to be your convention. And don't worry about not knowing anybody there. Before you go home you'll be an old friend of every fan and professional there. The keyword of the new Chicon will be complete informality and the real honored guest will be you.

OF course, it takes money to put on a good convention and the committee is already accepting honorary memberships. To be a registered member you need only send in a dollar bill with your name and address to Miss Bea Mahaffey, Secretary-Treasurer, 10th Anniversary World Science Fiction Convention, Post Office Box 1422, Chicago 90, Illinois.

YOUR dollar will be of great help in securing the hotel banquet facilities, the convention hall itself, and all the other many features that will be planned and developed as time goes on. So do your bit for a great science-fantasy cause right now. Send in your membership—even if you're not certain that you will be able to attend in person. Just remember that science fiction is the only type of literature that has world-wide unity and activity within itself, and every reader and lover of science fiction can be justly proud of this fact. We may not be

a select group of humanity but we certainly are unique in our organized fan activities. So don't put this off until tomorrow. Send in your membership now. It's *your* convention, and Chicago will make you proud of it.

A WORD or two about coming issues. The March issue will feature a new novel by Dwight V. Swain. You remember the terrific job he did with *CRY CHAOS!* in the September issue last year. We've never received such a flood of mail on any story as we did on that one. You told us to hold on to Swain—and we've done just that. Dwight is writing exclusively for *IMAGINATION*, so we can guarantee you a steady diet of the top notch stories he will write. This new novel, *DARK DESTINY* is another example of why Swain has been compared many times to Edgar Rice Burroughs. He has all the skill and craftsmanship that the great master excelled in so you know you're in for a thrilling time.

INCIDENTALLY, our new feature, *INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR* has proven very popular with you. We'd like to know if you'd like to have us include some of our top artists from time to time. Drop us a line about this.

IN case you're wondering about *TOFFEE*, the luscious gal will be featured in a new novel by Charles F. Myers very soon. You're in for the most hilarious fantasy time of your life! . . . Which just about winds up shop for now. See you the first week in January . . . wh

THE MOST HORRIBLE STORY

By

John W. Jakes

Do you think a story could ever make you shudder with a horror too great to bear? There is one like that—and you will have to read it!

THE room was a very plain room. It had four walls, a ceiling, a floor. But it was new to Thompson because he had never seen it before. He stood in a relaxed fashion, studying it. There was a desk in the center of the room. It was gray, but Thompson could not identify the material from which it was made. A very old man with a clipped beard sat behind the desk. A candle flickered in a brass holder on top of the desk.

"Pardon me," said Thompson.

The old man looked at him. He had been looking at Thompson for a long time. In fact, Thompson could not remember a time when the old man had not been looking at him.

"You like horror stories, I take it," the old man said. "That's why you're here. Everybody in the world likes a good horror story, at least once in their lives."

"Yes," said Thompson, filled with vague relief, "I guess that's why I'm here."

"Fine," said the old man. He

reached into the desk. Where, Thompson couldn't tell. Just out of sight. No drawers slid. But his hands came out, and they held a white card. Again they vanished. This time they held a metal-pointed pen. There was ink in the pen. It shone with a night-blue luster in the candle flame.

"Name," said the old man.

"James Thompson."

"Born."

Thompson thought a minute. "March third, nineteen oh two. Is all this necessary?"

The old man seemed annoyed. "Of course. We must have all the records, in order that you may become a full-time member."

"Full time member of what?" Thompson asked. He noticed that the pen seemed always full of ink.

"The Horror Book Club, of course," the old man replied. He scratched on the card, writing down the information Thompson had given him. Then he put both card and pen out of sight under the desk. His



His eyes showed a glazed expression of madness as the full import of what he had just read registered on his mind. And then he screamed—and screamed . . .

hands came back up, empty.

"Everything has been taken care of," he said, smiling. "You've been admitted."

"Is that right," Thompson said aloud. He had begun to wonder whether membership in this club was exclusive. The candle kept on burning, but it stayed the same size.

"Er . . . what kind of books do you have? I mean, could you let me have an idea of some of your titles? *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *The Turn of the Screw*, things like that?"

THE old man laughed again, this time like he was chiding a small and extremely foolish child. "Oh no, Mr. Thompson. We deal in actual, stark horror. We never use second-rate products."

The hands dipped down again. Thompson wondered if it was some kind of game. They came back up. They put a book on the desk. It was a thin book, roughly a foot square. It had a whitish cover. The old man's fingers rasped on the cover when he put it down on the desk.

"Human skin," the old man said cheerfully. "Very good finding."

"Um . . . yes," said Thompson. He glanced at the cover. In square letters the cover said, *The Most Horrible Story In The World*. Smaller type, down near the lower right hand corner, said, *James Thompson, January 3, 1953*.

"Why, that's today," Thompson said.

The old man waved. "A formality.

We always record on the books when a new member enters the club. Keeps the records straight."

"Oh," Thompson said. "Do I . . . just start reading?"

The old man shook his head and got up. He took the book in one hand, the candle in the other. "I'll conduct you to one of our reading rooms. We provide special reading rooms for the use of members."

Thompson did not comment. He followed the old man. They went through an opening in the wall that he had not seen before. But it was in a dim corner, difficult to see clearly.

They walked down a long hall. On each side of the hall were closed doors. The candle made shapes move on the walls.

"What's that screaming?" Thompson asked, a bit puzzled. "It seems to come from behind these doors."

"That's right," the old man said over his shoulder. "This is the Horror Book Club, you know. All of our members take an active interest in their reading. They participate. They get horrified. It's really a horrible book, you know."

"Is it?" Thompson felt a slight tingle of expectancy run along his back. He felt somewhat masochistic at the moment. A new thought struck him. "Is that the only book you carry?"

"Yes," said the old man. "We've had many editions made. It's the *most* horrible story in the world, you understand. The *most* horrible

one ever conceived. That's why all our members read it."

THE hall seemed to stretch on endlessly. Doors marched by. Screams faded, new screams took their place. "How late are you open?" Thompson asked.

"I stay here all the time," the old man said. "Members are always coming in. They usually stay for a long time. The book is irresistible."

"Must be," Thompson said.

Finally they came to a door. The old man stopped. He seemed to pull at the door and it opened, although there was no handle on it. He motioned Thompson inside.

The reading room had one chair and one table. An unlit candle stood on the table. The old man applied flame from his candle.

"Severe," he said, indicating the room, "but functional. All you really need to enjoy a good horror story."

"Well, thanks," Thompson stammered. The old man put the book down on the table. "Do . . . er . . . is it customary to pay, or tip?" Thompson said awkwardly.

"Oh no. The Founders take care of that."

"Um. Founders. Still alive, eh?"

"Oh, certainly."

"Must like horror stories, to set up a place like this."

"They do," the old man assured him. "Well, I hope you like the book."

He walked out and closed the door. Thompson said, "Well," a cou-

ple of times, saw that no one was listening, laughed foolishly and sat down on the chair. He picked up the book, feeling the tingle on his spine once more. He opened the book. He began to read.

It was a very short story. He finished it almost immediately. And it certainly was horrible. Almost too horrible. He closed the book and got up. His face felt very pale. He went to the door. He tried to open it. It would not open.

"Old man," he yelled. "Old man, old man." He was so insistent in his yelling that he did not stop to think about the other screaming out in the hall. He expected the old man to come, and he did.

The old man's voice said through the door, "Yes?"

"I don't like this book," Thompson said.

The old man said nothing.

"And the door's locked. I want to leave."

"You can't."

"What do you mean I can't? What kind of a place is this anyway?" His tone was threatening, beligerent. And weak.

"You're a member now." It was very final.

THOMPSON felt that the old man was gone. He shouted, "Old man, old man." There was no answer. He went back to the table. His stomach seemed to be gone. He opened the book. He read the story again. He couldn't help reading it.

It had a kind of fascination. He began to see the true horror in the tale.

When he had re-read it for the fifth time, he started to scream. Everybody else screamed, why shouldn't he? After all, he was in the mood, his stomach felt icy. The candle kept on burning, but it stayed the same size.

He alternated between periods of screaming and reading. And each time he read the book, it became more horrible. The infinity of horrible horror was something too vast

to contemplate.

He felt no need for food or water or sleep, the story was so horrible.

Thompson stopped screaming again and opened the book, perhaps for the thousandth time. He anticipated it now, anticipated the screaming it would cause.

The candle kept on burning. Thompson read the story from the book of skin with his name on it. He read it rapidly. It was a very short story:

You're dead.

THE END

"Go To The Ant . . ."

THE famous proverb, "Go, thou sluggard, to the ant . . ." contains a lot of sound advice—not only for the lazy—but for the scientist as well. Scientists have been turning to the animal world for information ever since it was learned that for tens of millions of years, bats have had a supersonic radar system of their own. It appears more and more that there is nothing really new under the sun.

The insect world is rich in the application of devices which have been considered the private domain of modern physics. The discovery that insects have built within them little "gyroscopes" is startling, but no more so than the fact that recently "radar" equipment has been discovered in the locust.

On the forehead of the locust are located five small patches of rather long hairs. It was empirically discovered that when jets of air were blown against these hairs, the wings of the insects fluttered rapidly, prac-

tically in direct response to the intensity of the air stream.

Dissection and analysis disclosed that large nerves led from the hair patches to the rudimentary brain and that electrical signals were generated by the pressure of the wind. What actually occurs in this "control system" is that the insect orients itself with respect to wind current directions by means of the hairs. It is almost a built-in response. Strong wind—rapid fluttering—etc.

A feeling is beginning to overtake science that Nature has anticipated their ideas on cybernetics and servomechanisms. The controls which man is so proud of have really been common to Nature. This accounts to a great extent, too, for the mysterious guiding "intelligence" that some scientists have claimed to have seen in the insect world. Actually there is no mysterious intelligence or brain operating for the mass of the creatures. Instead it seems that Nature has provided little servomechanism systems to do the work.

Juvenile Jackpot

IN their eager stumbling to sing the praises of that master story-teller Robert Heinlein, the reviewers have a tendency to stick strictly to his adult fiction and steer away from his juveniles, whereby they miss some of the finest science-fiction writing of our day! This is not a pointless hymn of praise but a realistic appraisal of Heinlein's quite mature approach to s-f even in stories intended primarily for children.

For those who are unaware of the facts, Heinlein has written a series of books concerning the adventures of teen-age boys in interplanetary affairs. These stories are conventional science-fiction, differing in no way from the sound precepts he has adopted for his own. The stories are tight action-adventure affairs, with a background which reads with hair-raising realism.

The latest effort along these lines is *FARMER IN THE SKY* (Scribners) the relatively simple tale of a family settling with a group of colonizers, the famed moon of Jupiter, Callisto. This in itself might not seem spectacular nor worth the eye of the dyed in the wool lover of s-f. But that would be a wrong judgment for "The Colonizers" operate with a background of detail so strikingly written as almost to seem to read like tomorrow's newspaper.

When you board the Callistan rocket and drive for the settlement you do so knowing that every scientific detail is exact as far as present engineering science can extrapolate and deduce. There is no hokus-

pokus or fantasy. There is science and fact. Nor is the human element neglected at all. In fact the characterizations are utterly and truly human with all the courage and weaknesses of humans. The heroes are not lily-white and the villains all have redeeming virtues.

The essence of *FARMER IN THE SKY* is realism, a realism which we haven't seen since early s-f readers were first enthralled by the very idea of a rocket to the Moon!

This unreserved praise might be questioned by some. Actually it is simply the sincere realization that Heinlein, in his own peculiar way, and in his unorthodox medium, is basically an artist, an artist successfully portraying segments of life yet to be lived.

The earlier juveniles of Heinlein, now rather well-known too, are equally efficacious in sustaining the illusion of what might be called "future reality." The things Heinlein describes in these books haven't yet happened, but you know for a certainty that they're going to!

If you're looking for entertainment, liberally spiced with the most subtle sort of education, never intrusive, peer into Heinlein's juveniles—they're more fascinating than his famed adult "History" series. And don't conclude that just because Heinlein's brainchild, *DESTINATION MOON*, the much touted motion picture film lacked plot and characterization, that these are in the same class. Far from it! Heinlein's Hollywood strictures don't apply to his juvenile word tossing. He's got Hopalong Cassidy beat a mile. . .

ALIAS A WOO-WOO

By
Sherwood Springer



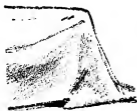
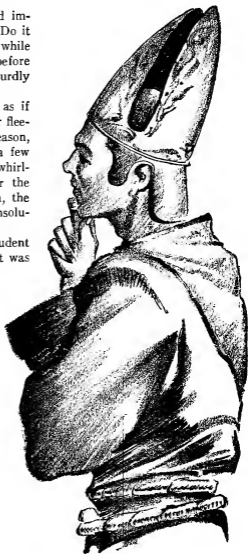
Simon stared thoughtfully at her. Yes, she was certainly a new model with very attractive features. And yet . . . "What's your conversational index?" he asked.

The love mate robots served the purpose of romance for both men and women. But Terry longed for a forbidden thing — the real McCoy!

TERRY Harrison reached impulsively for the phone. Do it now, she thought. Now, while the idea is white hot. Hurry, before logic convinces you how absurdly rash your plan must be.

She began to dial furiously, as if momentum itself could keep her fleeing heart safely ahead of cold reason, which she knew must be but a few steps behind. Her mind kept whirling back over the weeks, over the problem she had grappled with, the problem that had appeared insoluble.

And now, suddenly, this impudent inspiration. It was foolhardy; it was



daring; it was mad—but beneath it lurked a delicious tingle of anticipation.

If it worked . . .

It *must* work!

A click in the receiver announced that her connection had been made. A soft voice curled into her ear, "Patrician Creations, at your service."

"Let me speak to the business manager, please," Terry said, as she debated whether to turn on the visio.

In a moment she heard her brother's familiar voice, "Harrison speaking."

"Black jujubes," she said crisply. It was her personal code word of the week and would provide an identification precaution in lieu of the visio which she had momentarily decided against. She must not risk the possibility of weakening that a face-to-face conversation would entail.

"Jim," she said quickly, on hearing his "Green jujubes" countersign, "turn on the sealer."

When a low hum indicated that the electronic device, which insured them against wire tapping, was in operation, she continued, "I need your help, Jim. Desperately. Will you do something for me?"

"You know I will if it's possible, Terry. What's the game?"

"I'll be brief, and please don't pry into my motives. If this succeeds, you'll get a full explanation later. If it fails, there'll be no point in discussing it further. Listen, now. In the Temple of Efdar there is a

young Devotee called Mifriend Simon. Here is what I want you to do . . ."

* * *

MIFRIEND Simon sat ruminating at his desk for long moments after his visitor had gone. What was it about the interview, he wondered, that intangibly suggested intrigue? He went back over every word of their conversation, searching for some phrase, tone or expression that would provide a key to his suspicions. In vain. Apparently the man had been exactly what his credentials described him: a coverage representative for Patrician Creations. And yet . . .

His hand reached for the phone. A call would scarcely result in anything conclusive, but there was a slim chance the representative hadn't prepared a background fill-in. Reaching the coverage department of Patrician Creations, his query was answered in the affirmative. Yes, their Mr. Roper was making contacts in the Temple today. Was anything wrong?

"Not at all," Simon assured the department head. "Just confirming. Our procedure, you know." He let the phone drop into its cradle. It proved nothing, really. In a world where espionage was more widely practiced than either law or medicine, every other neighbor was a suspect. The fact that his visitor had been Roper, a bona fide Patrician salesman, in no way eliminated the possibility

the latter's work merely served as a cover-up for other activities. Reasoning further, the report that Roper was in the Temple was not proof that the man had been the salesman himself. Credentials, he well knew, were easily faked.

He dismissed the impulse to call others of the Devotees in an effort to learn whether they also had been interviewed. If intrigue there was, he was in no position to call unnecessary attention to himself. Since he was already committed, developments of the night would probably clarify the situation. At least, he would be on guard.

AS the tapping on the door ceased, Simon glanced at his watch. A minute past 22:30. Rather late for deliveries. Or was he unnecessarily suspicious?

Opening the panel, he stood aside as the two delivery men carried the long plastic container into the room. "Sorry we're late, Mifriend," one of them said apologetically. "Where do you want her?"

Obedient to Simon's gesture, they deposited the case upright in a corner, while the Devotee eyed them closely. One of the men extended a paper, which he signed, and the two turned to leave. At the door one of them turned, however, and said, "We're to pick her up in the morning. OK?" At Simon's nod, he added, "These new ones don't need to be turned on an' off, you know. They get recharged once a month."

"I'm sure she'll be satisfactory," Simon smiled. "Good night."

He waited a full five minutes after they had gone. Then, striding into the bathroom, he stared thoughtfully for some time at the reflection of his face in the mirror. Satisfied, but not entirely without misgivings, he reentered the room and swept it from wall to wall with a careful gaze. If what he surmised was true, the object in the case would contain both a concealed camera and recording device, and he was determined that as far as possible nothing of value would be picked up by either implement.

Drawing a deep breath finally, Simon approached the container. His hand paused on the fastening button while he read the gilt-edged label.

PATRICIAN CREATIONS

Love Mates for Discriminating

People

"Patrician Has No Peer"

AS he hesitated, Simon realized suddenly that up to this moment he had been so engrossed in trying to detect ulterior motives behind the day's events that he had devoted scarcely a thought to the events themselves. He had ordered a woo-woo and here she was. Or rather, he had let Roper persuade him to accept an example of their latest model on a one-night trial, at no cost or obligation whatsoever.

Simon, naturally had patronized the woo-woos just as everyone else did. But the Patrician line, he had al-

ways felt, was somewhat above his means. What did they have to offer, he might have argued in the past, that could not be obtained in the moderate or lower priced field?

Probably his suspicion of Roper was based on the very fact that the salesman was trying to promote his wares outside the air-yacht owning classes.

Enough of this speculation, he thought. The die was cast. If the evening was to hold anything but pleasure, at least he would be prepared.

He was on the point of pressing the unlatching mechanism when, spurred by a sudden thought, he stepped partially behind the case. The chance was remote, of course, but the box *could* contain some weapon which had been set to blast anyone normally standing in front of it when the lid swung open. His body safely out of direct range, his finger tightened on the button.

The case opened silently. That was all.

SIMON, feeling rather foolish, peered around the corner of the case. "Hel-lo!" he gasped, his fears momentarily vanishing as he stared at the turquoise-gowned girl who confronted him within the case. Tall, she was, almost as tall as he, with golden red hair upswept in a stunning coiffure that accentuated the smooth contours of her face and throat. The clinging gown subtly revealed a figure of pulse-quicken-

ing curves.

Activated by his greeting, she smiled warmly, affording him a glimpse of the loveliest teeth he had ever seen. "Hello," she said in a low vibrant voice.

"Won't you join me?" he asked.

"Of course." She stepped gracefully from the container and extended her hand. "It's been awfully stuffy in the case."

"I can well imagine," he replied, taking her hand and leading her to one of the two chairs a Devotee's room meagerly afforded. "I'm continually amazed at the progress the woo-woo technicians are making," he observed, as she seated herself. "Or perhaps I wasn't trying the right brand."

"I am not a Woo-Woo," she said. "I'm a Patrician Love Mate."

Simon smiled. "With a built-in plug, eh?"

Technically, she was right, of course. Woo-Woos were manufactured only by Woo-Woo, Inc., the originator of the love robots, and still, after a hundred and fifty years, the largest firm in the business. As their advertising stressed, "It's not a Woo-Woo unless it bears the name!" But despite the company's efforts, love robots were still woo-woos, just as, years and years before, phonographs of many brands had been called victrolas.

"That type of humor will get you nowhere with me," she said rather sharply. "You seem to know very little about proper activation."

Oh ho!" Simon gasped in mock surprise. "Something new has been added. A Tartar is in our midst. I suppose the proper activation would be for me to kiss you?"

"Not necessarily. But it's a thought."

"I'll think it then. Saint Ikis, you're unusual. What's your conversation index?"

"Two hundred and twenty thousand, seventeen point four."

"Preposterous," Simon sniffed.

Her eyes hardened as she retorted defensively, "Technicians have been working on me for five years."

Simon lifted his eyebrows in exaggerated shock. "My dear love mate," he said, "I'm amazed! You look positively virginal."

THE robot's answering glare was intensely human. "If this is your idea of a romantic approach, why did you bother to engage me?"

"My dear, I have news for that thundering ego of yours. I didn't engage you. You are here merely on a ten-hour, cost-free, unsolicited trial. In the morning you will be gone forever, and in the future I'll probably confine my interests to purely and adequately functional woo-woos."

"I am not a Woo-Woo," she repeated mechanically. "I am a Patrician Love Mate."

"You said that," he pointed out. Any patron of this particular model, he decided, would soon learn to curb his use of the term.

"Don't you think I'm adequately

functional?" she went on.

"How would I know?" he retorted, somehow nettled. "I only know you're insufferably beautiful, insufferably talkative and insufferably like a real woman." He paused, then added hastily, "As I imagine them to be."

"You mean you can only imagine what a real woman is like?" she asked pointedly.

That had been a serious slip. Simon's suspicions came flooding back. This amazing precocious robot seemed gauged to pry into his personal life. Dalliance with women was highest on the forbidden list. And he had almost revealed . . .

"Devotees of Efdar," he said with studied scorn, "are forbidden to consort with the female of the sex. Knowledge I have gained from literature has convinced me the rule was conceived in profound wisdom. Let us discuss it no more."

"Very well. But I think—"

"You think!" he exploded. "Since when is a robot supposed to think? That does it!" Simon's outburst was to some extent calculated. His fears had crystalized and here was an excellent pretext for removing the possibility of further and more serious breaks. Love y as this creature was, there was little doubt she was a mechanism for spying. "I'm in anything but a romantic mood. Let's put you back in the case."

The robot's eyes widened slightly and she seemed almost on the point of objecting, but the words

that came from her lips were the invariably acquiescent, "Of course."

Alone once more, Simon prepared for bed. But long after the room was in darkness he lay thinking. He cursed himself for letting Roper talk him into accepting the robot in the first place, but, strangely enough the last thing he could remember as he slipped off into fitful slumber was wondering who the real girl was who had modeled for the love mate.

. . . Sometime during the night he was half awakened by a sound. It was not an unusual sound, and his subconscious, cataloguing and filing that fact, attached too little importance to it to rouse him to alertness. He stirred slightly and then spiraled back into sleep.

"THE idea must have occurred to casting after I had turned in the reports of my contacts here in the Temple last week." Roper, his huge form relaxing in the same chair that had held the slim, soft body of the love mate, was smiling at Simon like an emcee about to present a fabulous jackpot to some fortunate GTV contestant.

"I'm certain," Simon said, watching the other intently, "the Mifriend Superior would never countenance the acceptance of your offer by any Devotee."

"Don't think of it as an offer on our part," Roper pointed out unctuously, "think of it as an opportunity for service on your part. There are hundreds of thousands of devout

followers of your faith. Women as well as men. In dalliance with their love mates it is not unreasonable to assume that even the most devout woman forgets the Efdar for a time. What a boon to the faith it would be if even their most secret passions were to be loosed upon and inseparable from an image, shall we say, of the Efdar cause. You are too intelligent, Mifriend, to discount the psychological impetus it would provide."

"You may have a point," the Devotee conceded. "But there are objections, too. You'll have to admit that a woman in the throes of love with a Devotee woo-woo has a profound sacrilegious aspect."

"'The Efdar loves His people,'" Roper quoted rather inanely. "The Efdar stands for love, and the Devotees are His prophets. Why not represent Him, too, in the most intense form of love? Miscalling it sacrilege is merely a matter of semantics. I assure you our advertising department will find no difficulty whatever."

"No," Simon mused, "it probably wouldn't." His mind flicked to the Hollywood realies and Gay D'Lure, the current rage. The ad men and their virtuosity had transformed an obscure receptionist into a star whose sultry appeal had made her face and body familiar in every corner of the globe. She had been matrixed by Woo-Woo, Inc., and it was reputed that already two and a half million facsimiles of her breasty loveliness

were gracing the bedrooms of men from Boston to Hong Kong.

"Matrixing will inconvenience you not at all," the Patrician agent pursued smoothly. "It's harmless, and the equivalent of a two-hour nap. Our limousine picks you up, you rest comfortably on the provider cushions for a short time while production makes a master of your cell structure, and then the limousine brings you back to your door."

SIMON examined his fingernails. "But why me?" he asked, controlling his voice to make his query sound casual. "There are hundreds of Devotees."

Roper's chuckle was hearty and apparently genuine, but was it, Simon wondered, just a mechanism to give the agent's racing mind time to devise a reply? True or not, the answer proved nothing.

"Esthetics, man! Surely you don't have to ask that question. Modesty's a desirable trait, but you do have a mirror. Be honest now. Where in the entire Temple could you find another Devotee to match your features or that husky six-foot build of yours? Our standards are high, and I doubt whether anyone else here could conform to them. You're an unusual specimen and in any other walk of life you'd have been approached by a scout long before this."

"Well . . ." Simon began hesitantly.

Roper, sensing victory, lifted his

portly frame to his feet. "Royalties on models as popular as you would be," he said, "sometimes reach fantastic sums. Picture the good you could do, the contributions you could make to your own cause, the missionaries, the new temples, the . . ."

Simon rose too, interrupting the flow of words with an upraised hand. "I'd like to—" he began.

The salesman closed quickly. "It's agreed then. I'll have the limousine call for you tomorrow. What time will it be most convenient?"

"I was about to tell you," Simon said, slightly annoyed, "that it is quite necessary for me to think this matter over first. I appreciate your offer, but the whole thing is without precedent and not a matter to be decided without some study."

"Naturally," Roper agreed. "However—"

Simon moved indicatively toward the door. "I must insist," he said with a new firmness in his voice. "If you wish, you may call me tomorrow for my decision."

"Of course." The salesman's words sounded grotesquely like a male love mate's, as he shook Simon's outstretched hand and displayed his best stock-in-trade smile. "I'll do just that."

AFTER Roper had gone Simon returned to his desk and resumed his finger tapping. Suddenly he realized what it was about this second visit that was not quite pat. Big corporations, he knew, were highly

departmentalized. Coverage was selling, expanding the market, and it had been as a salesman in that field that Roper had first approached him with the proposal to accept a Patrician love mate on trial, a love mate, incidentally, that had proved highly suspect. Today the man had returned, his mission bearing little relevance to the previous one and labeling him this time as a scout or an agent of casting. It was a switch that ordinarily would be improbable.

His current proposition, too, was pretty thin. Granted that Simon had no deformity and was reasonably handsome in his way, it was absurd to claim that he was so outstanding that in the outside world scouts would have beat a path to his door. And Roper's surmise that thousands of the faithful could be persuaded to clamor for the passionate embraces of a robed temple priest was doubtful at best. Above all, the temerity of presuming the Mifriend Superior would sanction such an arrangement was rank indiocry. Unless . . . He shook his head. If the Efdar Inner Circle were behind the move what conceivable point could there be in taking this obscure direction? Something else must be afoot.

Simon picked up the phone. "Directory," he said a moment later, and then added, "Sealer, please," as he switched on the visio. As the endless 10-inch-wide strip of directory began to unroll slowly upward on the screen and the protective hum sounded in his ears, he said in a low tone,

"S." The strip became a blur of gray as the rollers spun at high speed. In a few moments the "S" section had been reached and he was staring at a long list of safe deposit companies slowly unreeling on the screen. "Spies" was his next key and again there was a blur, briefer this time.

His first thought, naturally, had been of TWS. It had been as quickly discarded. Trans World Spies were the biggest in the business. Their agents covered the globe. They had a file on perhaps half the population of all civilized countries. But there were reasons why in this case he preferred to consult some smaller, less pretentious outfit.

The listing was a long one. Simon scanned them as they passed one by one. Slogans caught his eye, "TRY OUR SPY," "MIZE SPIES HAVE A THOUSAND EYES," "WE SPY ON SPIES." The last belonged to Omniferrets, a strictly local concern, in spite of their name, and he carefully noted their number. Switching off the directory and the visio, he began to dial.

MIFRIEND Simon tore off the strip of phonorecorded report from the machine just as a cashier would do with the receipt from a cash register, and held the paper with steady fingers as he read and reread the summary of Omniferret's three days of activity.

"CASE 32Y1711. Re W. Roper. Subject is highest paid coverage man in local branch of P.C., employed by

firm 14 years, transferred here six years ago from Chicago. He has no connection with casting department, but is close friend of J. J. Harrison, general manager, who recently has been holding long sealed conversations with an unidentified woman. No affiliation by subject with any espionage group discernible. Your description fits subject.

"RE PLOT. URGENT. Early investigation failed to reveal intrigue within P.C. directed at you. No one below highest echelon, save Roper, possibly suspect. Your Tuesday's refusal to be matrixed, however, set new wheels in motion. NOTE FOLLOWING CAREFULLY: On your customary walk to hospital this eve you will be accosted by two P.C. employes who, on pretext, are to take you to laboratory, by force, if necessary. After matrixing, one facsimile is to be made, and master destroyed. Bribe index of abductors, \$30; of production technician, \$110. Origin of plot not yet ascertained."

The message was unsigned.

Simon, his elbow on the desk and chin cupped in his left palm, began his interminable finger drumming while his eyes fastened on that single preposterous sentence. One facsimile. It didn't make sense. Why destroy a master after such extreme measures had been taken to obtain it? Who would go to such lengths for just a . . . ?

Suddenly, like the clear note of a bell on a quiet morning, the memory of a forgotten sound slid through

his welter of conjectures. His fingers halted in mid-tap and a curious tingle flashed up his spine. Saint Walce, why hadn't he suspected? His mind darted back to that night. The door had been bolted. He had been alone. Yet long after he had fallen asleep someone had been in his bathroom. Conversational index of 220,017.4 indeed!

The love mate had been a woman!

AS Simon turned into Drury Way he halted for a moment at the corner and drew from beneath his robe a long manilla envelope. Lifting the lid of the mail tube which projected from the street light standard, he dropped the letter into the opening whence it would automatically be conveyed to the central office.

That done, he turned and strolled leisurely toward the hospital, two blocks farther on. There were a multitude of sick to be comforted, and the Mifriends from the Temple were unfailing in their appointed rounds. Simon smiled ironically at the thought. This would be one evening a Mifriend would be absent. His decision had been made and, barring some change of plan by his abductors-to-be, his destination would be far from the bedsides of the ill. He wondered idly how the plotters would manage to —

With a sudden swish, a Duncan street glider swerved from the traffic and thudded to a halt at the curb ahead of him. A man leaped out in almost the same instant. Tall and

muscular, he was almost upon Simon before the latter could prepare a defense.

It was in anguish, however, and not menace, that the stranger gripped the Devotee's hand in both his own.

"Oh, Mifriend, hurry, hurry," his words gushed forth. "My father, unshriven, lies at the point of death. Fortunate it is we saw you. Had we gone on to the Temple it might have been too late. Even now we may not be able—"

"Peace, my son," Simon said. "Where is your father?"

"Not far. We can reach his side in five minutes. You'll come, you'll come?"

"Gladly." The Devotee was already being tugged toward the glider. As he stooped to enter the vehicle his last thought was: What an accomplished bit of acting it had been!

Simon was dimly aware of a second figure in the gloom of the driver's seat. Then he felt the sharp bite of the needle.

HE awakened under a blinding blue-white light that bored painfully into his eye sockets. In the split second before he again closed his eyes he saw that the spidery pantograph fingers of the matrixer were already withdrawing and retracting like the many jointed arms of a dentist's drill. Each measurement and contour of his body had already been minutely traced and re-

corded by the mechanism, and a master matrix was even then in the process of being made from the data. Once that was completed with an interior constructed from stock parts to match the multitude of coordinates involved, countless facsimiles could be processed on the assembly line from the master chart of indices.

By gingerly experimenting, Simon assured himself that he had sufficiently recovered from effects of the drug to begin his course of action. He raised himself on his elbows just as someone turned off the floodlight. His eyelids slid upward but a searing white afterimage blinded him to all objects not out of range of his focus.

"Ah, Mifriend, how do you feel?"

The solicitous voice that addressed him was only a few feet away, but Simon was forced to turn his head and focus his eyes on the far end of the room before he was able to make out the gray-smocked figure standing by the switchboard.

"Passably well," he replied amiably enough. There was nothing to be gained at this point by angry protest, even though he were to adopt that pose. Since plot and counterplot were coinciding for the time being, developments had not been unsatisfactory. "What did they use on me? Narcodine?" He sat up on the inflated cushions and dangled his bare legs over the edge of the table.

"I'm sorry, Mifriend," said the

voice, "I'm not sure I know what you mean."

Suddenly cautious, Simon asked, "Don't you think my manner of arrival tonight was somewhat unusual?"

"Unusual?" The technician frowned slightly. "Do you mean the hour? That isn't strange, since many models find the evening more convenient. You were already stripped and in place when I arrived, and since you were unconscious I assumed the attendant had already administered the pellet."

THE man's apparent sincerity was convincing and Simon perceived that he was unaware of any but his own particular phase of the drama being enacted. Sight was gradually returning to the Devotee's glare-ridden eyes and he was able to study the other at more length. The technician was a slightly built man of perhaps 60. An unnatural stiffness in his shoulders and a head that inclined oddly to the side indicated some malformation of the spine.

"I'm curious," Simon said disarmingly, "to know what you thought of the instructions they gave you in my case. Surely it isn't every day you destroy a master after one impression?"

"No, that was the part I—" the man began, then his face brightened suddenly. "Oh, now I'm beginning . . . this isn't a commercial processing. I might have known a Devotee wouldn't . . ." His thoughts

were overleaping his words. "This must be a personal pross for you. I'll admit I was puzzled."

Reasonably sure of his ground now, Simon smiled. The man would never know that he had just talked himself out of a possible \$110 bribe for information.

"You're an unusually intelligent man," he commended. "I hope I can take you fully into my confidence."

"But, certainly."

"Being a Devotee of Efdar, I was forced to be awkwardly discreet when I made arrangements for matrixing. I'm sure you understand." The other's head bobbed knowingly and Simon went on, "Now I must confide the remainder of my plan to your ears alone."

"It will make me happy to be of service, Mifriend."

"Listen carefully, then. The Devotees, in spite of their vows and their continent robes, occasionally develop human weaknesses." Simon lowered his voice impressively and cast cautious glances about the room. "You see, there is a girl. The one facsimile was to be delivered to her after the maser was destroyed. Those were to be your instructions. My real plan, however, had to be for your ears alone, and that's why I specified a discreet technician was to be chosen." Simon, pausing, noted his words were having the desired effect.

"You see," he continued, "there is to be no facsimile. Even the girl isn't to know." He winked confi-

dentially. "When the case arrives at its destination I'll be in it in person."

The other's eyes widened. "But . . ." His tongue halted while his mind sought objections to the unheard of scheme. "But . . . the specifications, that flat 15,000 index, progressive reflex, and the button starter model . . . won't she discover . . . ?"

Simon's mind raced. "The button presents no problem," he said as if he were already familiar with the specifications. "You can affix one in the customary place behind my ear. I'll take care of the index and the activations. What time would you have finished the copy?"

"Why," the technician said, "I'd promised, as you know, to try to make delivery by midnight, but at the time, not having seen you, I was not sure there would be no abnormal co-ordinates involved. You're a fine subject, however, and I'd have completed the number by 23.30, easily."

"Done, then," Simon said, as he eased himself off the table. "I'll wait. Let's cut off the matrixer and dispose of whatever your machine has already created. Where are my robes?"

When the other had produced the Devotee's garments and followed his directions concerning the partially made master, Simon slipped a \$25 coin into his palm.

"In appreciation," he said.

WHY, thought Terry Harrison in some disgust, must I be an abnormal woman in a normal world? Emotionally 200 years behind the times. Loving a man just as a peasant of the 20th century might have done! She grimaced at her reflection in the dressing table mirror. There you sit, she accused, beauteous your hair as if for a premiere . . . and for what? A love mate—a mere bit of mechanical gadgetry! Just because it happens to be the replica of a man—an impossible man, at that—you think you're in love with him. You . . . you atavism!

A buzzer interrupted her thoughts. Compressing her lips quickly once more to make sure of the line of her azure lipstick that matched her flawlessly done nails, Terry rose and hurried to the door.

"Evening, miss," one of the men greeted her. "Your order from Patrician Creations."

At her bidding, the men placed their burden against the wall and waited while she signed the slip. She carefully bolted the door after they had gone.

"This isn't exactly as I would have preferred it," she said aloud as she turned and gazed at the sleekwood box. "But since in the flesh you're such an utterly absurd creature, I suppose we will both be happier this way."

She started toward the case and then, on second thought, wheeled and crossed the room. By dial she selected a continuity of numbers

from her record library, and in a moment soft music pervaded the room. The lights she adjusted to a dim flaming glow. Then, adjusting her negligee to a more seductive position, Terry again approached the case.

Her slender fingers pressed the catch and the lid swung wide. The robot stood there, his eyes closed, his arms rigidly at his sides. You look more like him than he does himself, Terry thought tremulously. Her heart fluttered as she summoned strength to raise her hand to the level of the activator button on the love mate. What an exquisite job they had done! Her fingers slid along his cheek, crept behind his ear. Still warm, she discovered, evidently from his trial activation. "At least," she said as her finger hesitated on the button, "you won't tell me I'm insufferably like a woman!"

SHE pressed firmly and the robot's eyes opened. Life seemed to flow miraculously into his features, and as she greeted him with the customary "Hello," his lips broke into a grin.

"He-lo!" he said, his eyes doing a lightning up-and-down of the soft contours confronting him.

"They've even duplicated your inflection," she exclaimed. "The seven wonders of cybernetics! Won't you join me?" She turned gracefully and he followed her to a soft fleecy divan. "Sit down and let's see what other surprises you have up your sleeve.

And speaking of sleeves, I'm sure you can dispense with your outer robes. This is supposed to be a cozy evening, and I'm wearing the most comfortable thing I can think of. There's no point in setting an example if no one follows it."

The love mate looked puzzled.

"I should have doubled your index," Terry said in disgust. "Can you understand the one syllable: Strip?"

He hesitated a moment, then with an "Of course," he rose and moved toward a chair, where he removed and placed his outer garments, one by one.

"Much better," Terry commended, as he returned to his seat on the divan. "Now relax for a moment. I feel like being insufferably talkative, and since you are you and not he, I'm sure you have no objection."

She withdrew a cigarette case from a wall recess and selected one of the pale yellow cylinders. It was already lit when she drew it from the case. Tucking her legs beneath her, she leaned back in the corner of the divan and exhaled a wisp of smoke. The strains of "A Million Kisses Ago," one of the many old forbidden tunes that Terry's library included, formed a nostalgic background for her mood.

*" . . . A cigarette
Helps me to forget
The lips I knew a million kisses
ago."*

"Love," Terry murmured, closing her eyes. "Why was I born two

hundred years too late? Why must it be criminal, or at least reactionary, to love a man of real flesh and blood? Why must the word itself be so distasteful? Why are songs and poems and stories about love banned from the air? Even the legitimate theatre doesn't dare treat it unless it's a period piece to demonstrate how utterly decadent our ancestors were.

"What do we have now to replace it?" she continued with a measure of disgust. "Love mates! Gadgets that cooperate and say 'Of course' and cooperate and say 'Of course' and cooperate and say 'Of course'! Can you see how raddening it could become to a romantic throwback like me?" She looked directly at the robot.

"Of course," he said.

TERRY rolled up her eyes in mock desperation. "My white as-kate!" she moaned. "Try to imagine your prototype Simon coming up with a reply like that. No, on second thought, that's exactly what he would say—deliberately."

As Terry paused to regard the smoke from her cigarette, a plain-tive voice was singing:

*"I tried to be
One who denies love,
I couldn't see
Or recognize love . . ."*

"You know," Terry said suddenly, "I even thought several times I'd sign up for the Moms. The pay is tremendous and the government pen-

sions you off liberally after the tenth child. Of course, even there you don't have a man to yourself, and perhaps ten different Dads are involved, but at least the life is more like nature intended than this one. Of course the prospect of my babies being raised as wards of the government rather cooled me on that one, so I decided to keep looking. Sooner or later I knew I'd find the man I wanted—and I felt he'd be as atavistic as I was. We could be brazen together."

The music slipped into "Exquisitely Blue," Terry's particular favorite.

*"I close my eyes and there you are,
Waiting to undo*

*My heart again and, darling, then
I'm exquisitely blue."*

She slipped her cigarette into a disposal tube at her elbow and turned to stare pensively at the robot. "So I found him at last," she said. "And what do you think? On top of all the barriers our diabolical society has erected against me already, I run up against another one beyond even my ability to hurdle. He's a Devotee of Efdar!"

Almost in resignation, she uncurred from the divan and crossed the room. Turning the light down even lower, she returned, this time snuggling close to the love mate.

Her fingers caressed the back of his hand. "I want to forget the world now, darling," she murmured. "Make love to me." The robot's other hand

moved to her forearm, in obedience to his progressive reflex mechanism. She stroked his wrist, and his fingers stole caressingly past her elbow. As Terry's hand finally reached his shoulder, his, keeping mechanically a step ahead, had already encircled her waist . . .

A LONG time later, as she was reaching for another cigarette, she said, rather inanely, "Historians will probably call this the Woo-Woo age."

"I am not a Woo-Woo," her companion announced brightly, "I'm a Patrician Love Mate."

Terry's hand halted and her body stiffened perceptibly. There was a long uncomfortable silence as her mind raced. *That* was one thing she had ordered eliminated. Could the technician have misread the specifications? Or could . . . ? Her heart began to pound uncontrollably.

She studied the robot in the dim light, then she said slowly, enunciating each word carefully and straining to keep excitement out of her voice, "This has been a lovely evening but like all others it has to end. There'll be many more. At least we can thank technology for extending the life of love mates indefinitely. There's nothing like a hermetically sealed refrigerating cabinet for keeping you forever fresh. Come, I must put you away now."

As she rose and extended her hand, she peered at him closely. Was it imagination, or did she detect in-

decision in his sea-gray eyes. He got to his feet, however, and followed her toward a rectangular panel in the wall.

"Many apartments aren't equipped with these," she explained as the panel opened to her touch. "But they're marvelous. Not a speck of dust or a breath of air can reach you."

In trepidation, she waited a long moment, then: "Step in, please." Was it the light, or did he seem to hesitate? She couldn't be sure, for now he was entering the recessed cabinet. He turned and stood watching her, the expression on his face completely unfathomable.

Terry smiled at him sweetly. "Good night darling," she said, and closed the door slowly and carefully.

"Wait!"

The word had sliced like a scalpel through the final crevice before the panel clicked shut.

The blood from Terry's rioting heart thundered in her ears. It was true, it was true, it was true! Her fingers fumbled frantically in the semi-darkness for the panel button. Hurry, you wretch, before he smothers. The button, press it quickly. There!

The door swung open silently, and there was Simon, smiling ruefully. "You win," he said. "You don't bluff worth a tinker."

"You beast," she accused. "How did you manage it?"

"You're just piqued because I was

able to duplicate *your* trick," he said, stepping toward her.

"Oh. You knew?"

"You have no idea how transparent you were that night."

"I could have cheerfully killed you for putting me back in that horrid box," she grinned.

"Well, comfort yourself. You almost did just now by sealing me in this iron maiden."

AS they conversed, Terry was backing slowly toward the divan, keeping just out of reach of Simon's advancing steps.

"Do you have to look so menacing?" she asked, then a certain ludicrous grimness about him set her off in a ripple of laughter. He countered by suddenly shoving her backward so that she landed with a bounce on the fleecy cushions.

"After all that unburdening I heard tonight," he growled, "I thought you might be interested in knowing you're not the only reactionary left."

Terry gasped "But you're a Devotee!"

"I've got news for you, wench. My assignment's completed, my report's in the mail, and I'm free to tell you this. I'm not Mifriend Simon."

Her lips parted in objection. "But—"

"The real Simon was a Devotee out on the Coast with a reasonable bribe index who was persuaded to disappear two years ago. I came east

on his credentials and since then have been running down an Eldar plot to overthrow the government. My real name's King. Lewis King of Trans World Spies."

"Oh, then . . . then . . . !" Terry was unable to find words to translate the sudden surge of song in her heart.

"Your cute little operation last week had me really worried," he went on. "I was right on the eve of wrapping up my mission, and for a time I thought they had me spotted."

She reached for his hand and drew him down beside her. "Oh, Simon—Lewis, I mean—it's, it's—" She was about to bury her face in his arms, then her head abruptly snapped upward. "Little operation, you call it! That was the most maddening ordeal of my life. I—"

Terry's words were smothered as he suddenly crushed her to him and pressed his lips on hers.

Minutes later he said, "Like you, I've been seeking, too. Tonight I've found the hook to hang my dream on. I'm not sure how we'll manage this, but others are defying convention. Marriage ceremonies can be had in the underground, and, who knows? A complete moral revolution may be brewing. We'll work it out somehow."

They sat silently then, staring into each other's eyes and into the future. Minutes passed. Their thoughts spiraled and spiraled and coalesced. They both smiled at al-

most the same instant.

It was Terry who put it into words.

"I wonder if you are half the man a love mate is."

Her gaze dropped to watch her hand. She moved it slowly, like a

creeping caterpillar, toward his. In fascination, King's gaze followed hers, and then their laughter merged as his own hand came to life . . . and began inching mechanically toward her wrist . . .

THE END

Popular Math

EVEN with the general popular distaste for that horrible subject mathematics, that every person has felt at one time or another, there is a growing appreciation of its unquestionable fascination. It isn't the scientific angle necessarily, that's intriguing, but rather the existence of the common everyday, down-to-earth side of it.

Puzzles and problems are curiously popular in spite of their essentially mathematical background. Evidently this is so because people feel that when they're solving a puzzle, they aren't doing it with "repugnant" mathematics. Of course they are, but at least it's sugar-coated!

Consider the business of tying knots, or the equally fascinating pleasure of watching a magician squirming out of a coat under an overcoat without taking off the latter. Both of these things are branches of abstruse mathematics known as "topology" and have been the subject of tome after tome. In their simplest form they are extraordinarily interesting.

The forbidding heights of advanced mathematics repels all but the most fanatic. Why this is so, is easy to understand when you examine the complex out-of-this-world symbols and reasoning used, but if you scrape

away the facade of technical detail and peer into the heart of the thing you discover some incredibly absorbing things. This is true particularly of modern physics which has become a mumbo-jumbo of mathematical complexity. But inside the jungle of symbols you get a glimpse into a queer never-never world — that is the real world!

In such mathematics two things occupy the same space at the same time, and things move from one place to another without passing through the intervening space! But that's the merest logical child's play to the advanced mathematician. It is a world where intuition and common sense have no place whatsoever. It is the kind of space you find inside the heart and nucleus of an atom or a star.

Who can resist then, if at all encouraged, to look a little deeper than the boring algebra or geometry book? The things they do and the things they say in the mathematical world have all of the whimsy of Lewis Carroll and all of the zaniness of Danny Kaye. In spite of this, from such odd ideas and weird concepts that infest the brains of the "professors" come the building blocks of the hum-drum everyday scientific world . . .

YACHTING PARTY

By Fox B. Holden

While their crew worked feverishly to repair the damaged rocket ship, the passengers set out to explore the planet. Thus they met the Hairy One . . .

THE girl, Marla, trembled, yet she was not afraid. Ronal had told her at the outset of the cruise that although Krist's friend Logan was young for a space pilot, he was a good one, and had trained in the old fuel-propelled ships that men had first flown Space in before the new warp-drive had been perfected. But Logan was sweating visibly.

The blue planet loomed up, and Krist, who owned the trim Space-yacht and had suggested the cruise, jumped noticeably when the first shrill whistle of atmospheric resistance pierced the tense quiet of the well-appointed control room.

They were half-falling, half gliding downward, and despite Logan's attempts to check their descent with the clogged free-drive maneuvering jets, their downward speed seemed to increase each second.

"My fault," Ronal muttered so only Marla could hear. "Had we stayed on the warp we charted and not followed my suggestion to go adventuring on free-drive in some system none of us have ever heard of, we wouldn't be in this mess."

"Not your fault, dear," Marla said to her husband. "Even Logan couldn't have known the free-drive would fail and leave us too far from our warp-point to make it back, and—"

The stricken craft lurched again, and the polished nose began an almost imperceptible up-swing. The shrill scream of the rarefied atmosphere began descending the scale like a gigantic siren running down.

"Flat on the deck!" Krist yelled.

Lush, green forests stretched but scant miles below. The sound of a heavy, rich atmosphere now racing past their gleaming hull dropped to a low, moaning note and then the sound of it was gone.

The nose came up.

There was a wrenching jar and the nerve-shattering cry of tearing, scorched metal. The control-room rocked crazily, then was suddenly still, cocked at a nightmare angle, as a shuddering impact brought the wildly slewing craft to a punishing halt.

And for the four of them, there was sudden oblivion . . .



"MARLA was as lucky as the rest of us," Ronal said. "Just the wind knocked out of her. She's coming around." The girl's silver-flecked eyes were already open and for a moment there was forgetfulness in them. "We splattered a little," Ronal told her. "You move all right?"

She was shaken, but unhurt. He helped her to a standing position on the canted deck, and saw that Krist and Logan were already taking a rapid inventory of the yacht's available tools.

"Got to look around outside," Logan was saying, shaking his bruised head a little, "before I can tell you

how bad we are. But I think Krist and I can get her back into one piece."

"Can if we can go out," the tall, athletic-looking owner of the pleasure craft said. "We'll need the suits."

"Maybe not," Ronal said. "There was plenty of atmosphere waiting away—"

"Five credits gets you 20 it's all pure poison," Logan retorted. He was standing at one of the metaloglass ports, surveying the colorful terrain speculatively. They joined him.

The ship had hit in an oblong clearing, perhaps five miles in length and half that in width. Surrounding the open, grassy spot were the depths of an untamed, riotously colored jungle.

"I'll give it a try in a suit," Logan said. "The sooner we patch up and get out of here the better. No telling what's in that." He gestured toward the clearing's mile-distant edge.

Ronal helped him into the bundle-some plasti-seal space-suit, then watched tensely with the others as the starboard airlock hissed, and Logan stepped onto the thickly-carpeted clearing floor.

"He's a cool kid," Ronal said. "For all we know, he's just—"

"He's a cracker-jack mechanic," Krist interrupted. "If we've got a couple of straight rivets left, he'll get us out of here. I'm just glad that he picked out this planet to

come in on instead of the first or second out from this system's sun. It's plenty hot even here." They were all perspiring freely; the atmosphere conditioner had ceased operating from the shock of landing.

Logan's voice cracked from the still-functioning communications panel.

"Not too bad. Forehull plates got a little bashed in — couple of rips in the speed-skin. Take us maybe four, five days to get her Space-worthy again. Can unclog the free-drive jets in a day easy. But the guy who thought of leaving modern yachts equipped with free-drive units oughtta be hung from a comet tail."

THEY could see Logan near the nose of the ship. His hands were working at his helmet.

"Take it easy!" Krist called. They could hear a soft hiss in the intercom.

"Letting some of this stuff in, a cubic millimeter at a time, grandma! If I can breathe it, I'll let you know. If I can't — Anyway, if we can work without the suits, it'll get us out of here that much sooner. Don't know about you kids, but I didn't even bring a sling-shot along . . ."

Krist traded looks with Ronal. There wasn't so much as a hand-gun in the whole ship. Neither said what was in his mind but Ronal drew Marla a little closer and broke the silence.

"You'd think they'd equip even pleasure craft with a few of these scientific gadgets you hear about, instead of taking up room with a lot of old-fashioned fuel tanks and jets that nobody needs. With an atmosphere or gravity tester things like this would be a lot less risky. Got to admire Logan's nerve."

"He's got his suit off!"

It was true. Logan was walking slowly, experimentally about, eyeing the surrounding terrain to estimate their situation, unhampered by the suit. He moved slowly, but not laboredly.

"Let's get some tools out there!" Ronal said. "The three of us can—"

"There's only the emergency kit. Tools enough for two, working simultaneously. You better stick with Marla, Ronal, and both of you can keep a weather-eye out for — anything — while we're putting this egg together again."

"How about trying to contact some Stellar Patrol outpost? They—"

"No good. We're way off our warp. Even if we had the power, it'd take our beam, like our ship if it had enough free-drive fuel—about eighty thousand years to reach the nearest one. Remember, kid, we had warped some fifty thousand light years out before you talked Logan into leaving the warp to fool around in free Space for awhile. Until we can jet our way back to warp-point, we can forget about communica-

tion."

Ronal understood too clearly what Krist was talking about. Travel in "free" Space, the ordinary three-dimensional kind, was measured in miles; warp-travel was measured in parsecs. "Free" speed, with old-fashioned fuel-eating jets which were supposed to be carried as emergency power units only, was forty thousand miles a second at best—warp-speed, depending on the dimension you used, had a top of better than a thousand light-years a minute. Leaving your warp to poke around in ordinary three-dimensional Space on jets was like leaving your surface-car parked on a speedway to hike up a side-road on foot. You had to get back to the speedway to get home. And if you broke a leg—

KRIST was already outside, lugging tool-carriers to a spot Logan had selected to begin. Ronal turned to his wife.

"Well, we can't keep a weather-eye out for bug-eyed monsters in here," he said. "Might as well go brave the Great Unknown ourselves. C'mon!"

The heavy grass was wet and soft beneath their feet, and had a distinctive aroma of its own. Ronal thought to himself as they walked that perhaps the red, desert covered fourth planet would have been a better bet after all—at least cooler.

"We shouldn't get too far from the ship," Marla said.

"We won't. But I just want to look around — want a closer look at the jungle from the edge of the clearing. Always wanted to be able to tell people I'd been exploring on some strange, exotic planet somewhere—"

"It's strange enough. But quiet up to now, anyway. Maybe all that—"

They had reached the clearing's edge.

And saw the Hairy One for the first time.

Marla stopped in mid-sentence, and they stood transfixed.

The Hairy One regarded them evenly with small, narrowly-spaced black eyes. He remained as immobile as the two from the ship.

"Like a man, but smaller," Marla whispered tautly.

"But covered with hair! And on all fours," Ronal said. Marla started to speak again, but he silenced her with a nervous gesture. The ape-like creature cocked its head, as though listening. A light breeze made ripples in the thick hair on his narrow, sloping back, but for long moments he did not stir, nor did Marla or Ronal advance toward him.

The Hairy One fixed his gaze on Marla, then shifted it to her husband. Then, as though at a signal, he turned abruptly and shambled off into the dense undergrowth at a rapid pace without so much as a backward glance.

"Better be on our way back," Ronal said. "If he's displeased with

us, he'll have his whole tribe on our necks."

To run a mile's distance had never been difficult for either the man or woman before, but on this lush planet with its heavy, sweet atmosphere and slightly greater gravity than that of their own home sphere, it seemed to both that the distance between them and the ship would never be covered. Ronal glanced over his shoulder twice as they ran, but there were no signs of activity at the jungle's edge. But the heavy foliage would make perfect camouflage for an entire army . . .

KRIST dogged the airlock shut.

"The best bet," he said, "is to barge right in and let them all see us. If we can let them know, or get them to understand, that we're weaponless and harmless, they won't attack."

"That would only work if their thinking is based on our system of logic," Logan said. "We don't know that it is. It could easily be suicide to step one inch inside that seething tangle."

"But you've both missed the big point," Ronal said. "I doubt very much if he, or they can 'think' at all as we know thought. He is no more than a beast—a jungle beast, and would behave according to what I've read is the first law of the wild—exterminate the intruder to protect yourself. And I think if he and his kind did attack, it would be under cover of darkness."

"He might've killed us both an hour ago," Marla said then. "But he didn't. He showed no sign of hostility."

"She's right on that," Ronal admitted. "He ran!"

There was silence for a moment, and then Logan spoke again.

"We could go on like this for hours and get nowhere. Hours that could be a lot better spent. We know nothing of the situation on this planet beyond the hull of our own ship. I think our best protection is completing repairs as quickly as possible and getting out. Ronal and Marla can still keep an eye out. If anything happens, we can always get into the ship before they reach us. We'll all have to remain within the ship at night, of course. And without any weapons, that's all there is to do."

IN the days of feverish work that followed, the life that they all could feel was teeming within the hot, moist jungle that surrounded them gave little hint of its presence save for an occasional beast-like scream and the cries of birds. And the nights were quiet save for the sound of warm breezes riffling their way through lush foliage.

"But I can feel a thousand eyes upon us for every move we make," Marla said.

"It'll be all over in a day or so," Ronal reassured her. "Logan says that we'll be able to blast off without even trying to shift the ship's posi-

tion. Chances are we won't even set eyes on our hairy friend again, much less any of his tribesmen. Don't worry."

But it was the next morning that they saw the Hairy One again.

"He's trying to get up into that tree with the fruit on it," Marla said, "but the trunk's too big around for him to climb, and the lowest branch is too high for him to reach."

"He seems to be alone," Ronal said.

"And he doesn't even seem to know we're still here."

"I wonder if he really cares," Ronal said, and began walking slowly toward the clearing's edge.

"You aren't going to—"

"Got a funny feeling. And I want a closer look. He could get that fruit, if—"

"If he could *stand!*" Marla completed. The implications of what Ronal suggested came fully upon her for the first time. Quite evidently, she understood now, the all-fours attitude of the Hairy One was not just for ease of jungle travel. It was a permanent attitude because the beast had not yet attained the ability to stand erect!

"I've an idea," Ronal said. He quickened his stride. "But you'd better go back with Krist and Logan. It's possible that—"

"I will not! And what danger is there? For nearly a week we've been here, and although we've all felt uneasy, this is the first we've seen him since that first day. There

hasn't been even a hint of hostility. What more can he be than just a harmless, stupid beast?"

The Hairy One halted his tree-climbing efforts when he saw them, but made no move to either retreat or advance. As before, he stood immobile and watched. Ronal and Marla approached with the palms of their hands opened and outward, hanging limply at their sides. And as they approached, Ronal swept the jungle edge with his eyes, to peer as deeply into its tangled growth as he could. Nothing moved.

Within scant yards of the beast, they stopped.

The Hairy One was watching Marla.

RONAL dropped to all fours. And it was a peculiar, silent melodrama that followed then. A highly-cultured man from a well-ordered, civilized galaxy, making a crude attempt to teach a beast to walk, on the face of a planet which, but a few days before, he had never known existed.

Why? Marla wondered. What fascination had there always been between alien cultures, that had always made one attempt to instruct the other in its ways? Certainly Ronal was no scientist, no explorer. Yet, as though he were an appointed ambassador of his own kind, he was attempting the always risky job of finding a common level of understanding with an alien mind.

Or perhaps it was just natural

curiosity, and an overabundance of self-confidence!

Ronal had imitated the creature's all-fours shamble until he was beneath the tree limb.

"Careful," Marla said. "Don't give him the idea you're trying to steal his fruit, or we will be in trouble."

Far out from where the fruit hung, Ronal stood up slowly. Then he raised his arms, opened his hands, touched the limb with his fingers.

Then he dropped back to the all-fours position, and repeated the standing up process.

Then at length, he pointed to the Hairy One, to the position under the limb above which the fruit swung, and backed slowly to where Marla stood, fascination in her eyes.

The Hairy One remained immobile. There seemed no flicker of comprehension in his flat, black eyes. Then suddenly, for the quickest flash of an instant, he came almost erect, his arms half upraised!

Then he dropped back, as though exhausted and baffled by the effort.

"He did it!" Ronal exclaimed. "He can understand!"

Ronal went through the weird pantomime again, but although the Hairy One stood once again and even accomplished two staggering steps forward, he dropped back once more without having reached the fruit.

"We had better go back," Marla said. "He—it—I don't think you should've, Ronal."

"No harm done. But before we give up my little experiment—"

Ronal reached up, plucked the fruit and in one fluid motion tossed it to the Hairy One. And deftly, it was caught!

And as quickly thrown forcefully to the ground!

"You've angered him, Ronal! You've—"

"But he could see I wasn't stealing it—"

The Hairy One did not move. Crouched, he watched them; watched Marla.

SUDDENLY, Ronal was clearing a small area of the thick, carpet-like grass. Then in the soft, rich dirt which he had exposed, he began making swift, simple diagrams. They depicted the ship, surrounded by a forest. Then, pointing first to his crude drawing, then to the Hairy One, to themselves, then to the ship, Ronal waited.

But the beast did not move.

"Take him along? Back with us?" Marla whispered.

"Why not?" Ronal answered. "If our experts could communicate with him, or at least study him, there's no telling — wait!"

The Hairy One had started to stand, step forward, then stopped.

"We had better go, Ronal." Marla was frightened, now. "You've made him resent us. We should leave him to this world where he belongs, and we should return to ours where we belong."

"One more try. Then, if it doesn't work—"

Ronal, almost as though caught in a trance, began to take a slow, cautious step toward the immobile beast before him. And stepped back quickly!

For the Hairy One had in an instant grabbed from the ground a heavy, club-like stick! Yet he had not raised it, but merely held it meaningfully, pointed downward.

Ronal stood motionless. The Hairy One watched Marla, then Ronal. Then he dropped his club, silently picked up the fruit he had thrown to the ground, and turned. Then he vanished once more into the jungle.

A day later, for merely a moment before Logan punched the acceleration warning buzzer for take-off and switched on the jet detonators, they saw the Hairy One for the last time.

"Look, Krist! Marla! There he is! And by Betelgeuse if he isn't *standing up!*"

Even at a mile distance they could discern the erect figure of the mute, enigmatic denizen of this strange, new planet—immobile, watching, but on two feet.

"And on those forelegs of his were more hands than feet—and what someday might be a thumb, to oppose his fingers!" Ronal was saying quietly.

Marla and Krist knew what was in Ronal's mind. And Marla was

glad they were about to blast off. There had been something in the way the beast had watched them, had watched her—

They knew what Ronal was thinking. But it was all they would ever know.

They took their places in the acceleration hammocks.

Seconds later, with a great, shuddering roar, the gleaming Space-yacht leaped skyward and disappeared into the blue vault of the sky.

* * *

The Hairy One watched for min-

utes afterward, then dropped back to all fours and shambled through the jungle. His legs hurt strangely, and his arms—

Perhaps he should have accepted their offer and gone with them to their bright, shining world.

Or, perhaps, taken the woman and started—started what? He could not remember.

He stumbled awkwardly into the overgrown ruin of shattered masonry and twisted steel wherein he slept, and laid down.

He felt very tired.

THE END

Moratorium On Science?

FREQUENTLY you hear someone say, "the trouble with the world is that science is advancing too fast—it's outpacing Man." And like most of us you nod your head and agree, "yes, it is—science has certainly outsped sociology," and then everybody takes another drink and the conversation shifts to something else.

But have you ever considered a world where scientific research and advancement was taboo? True, science-fiction authors have used this theme quite often, mostly as a show-piece to show how it is impossible for people to exist without organized science, and what a horrible world it would be any way. In other words, they've usually loaded the dice in their stories.

You don't have to go to science-fiction for an answer to the mythical question. There are many primitive cultures still extant in the world which have no scientific de-

velopment and yet which do exceedingly well. The Eskimo society, certain African tribes and numerous tribes of the South and Central Pacific live in a science free world. An initial glance at their social organization tends to make you think it repugnant but if you go deeper than indoor plumbing, fancy automobiles and exaggerated entertainments, you find a philosophical depth of satisfaction that no "scientific" civilization offers. Before the coming of the white man everywhere, these conditions were common among many peoples who got along exceedingly well without machinery. But today most of the world has been corrupted by the so-called scientific attitude.

A perfect example of an un-scientific society, uncluttered with the trivia of mechanisms is the ancient City-State of Greece, where in some respects human beings reached the heights of their powers and glory.

They worshipped not at the statue of Thor or Loki, but instead before the goddess of Wisdom, Athena.

Imagine then a society which frowns on its scientists, and instead of encouraging them, gives artists, musicians, painters, sculptors and poets full freedom and encouragement! What a blossoming place of happiness that might be!

Unfortunately this mythical paradise will never be. For once you have tasted of the poisoned fruit of sci-

ence, you are doomed to eat more and more of it. There is no going back from just one scientific step. You cannot become a Lotos-eater. So you crawl back into your laboratory and compound ingenious mechanisms which you in your naive innocence believe to be harmless and of course fall into the hands of the perverted to become fearful boom-crangs against you. Will that paradox ever be resolved?

* * *

Helicopter Era

IN spite of all of the talks of jets and rockets, the vehicle which will be of most use to the average man of the future is the helicopter. It will be the private car of everybody—someday. Already it has demonstrated its exceeding usefulness in the Korean War. Its ability to hover and fly, ascend and descend vertically at crawling speeds, truly gives men mastery over the third dimension in a way that no airplane can. Why then, don't we see more helicopters?

The answer is simple. At present they're complicated and difficult to build—they are just being given the mass production treatment now. But above all, flying a helicopter is a four-limbed job and the pilot requires a great deal of skill.

Fortunately, it has been announced that a simple, miniature automatic pilot has been designed, one which is capable of eliminating most of the tedium and difficulty of operating the 'copter.

This is a grand advance for it means that the day of the 'copter is that much nearer. Someday 'copters are going to be almost as common as automobiles!

Planetaria U.S.A.

THE ability of American industry to "roll its own" is now an established fact. In terms of tools and instruments, practically anything built anywhere in the world, whatever its quality, can be duplicated right here in our own American factories.

Nowhere is this better demonstrated than by the announcement that at long last, planetaria are being made here! Formerly these ultra-complicated, super-precise optical instruments were made at only one place in the world, the Zeiss Optical works in Germany. Bombed out during the war, and ravaged by the Soviets, the Zeiss plant is slowly coming into its own, but it is unable to supply the American demand for planetaria. So under the direction of an American scientist, almost exact duplicates of the famous Zeiss, dumb-bell shaped planetarium are being manufactured from war surplus lenses and other optical supplies. The home-made instruments work as well too!

It is a heartening thought to realize that we can do anything! The present and the future belong to the technicians!

Richard Matheson's LETTER

**Letters warning of an invasion of Earth
find their way into the editorial waste basket.
But this one offered some proof to back it up!**

DEAR Bill:

Well, the jig is up. You'll have to get another boy to take my place. I can't write another word. I'm through. Why? You got reason to ask. How many times did I tell you I got about fifty years of stories in me? It must have been a million. Well that's all off.

You're the last to know about this. I just didn't want to write my agent first and say all bets are off. Not before I was sure. Well I'm sure now, cuss it.

It started about a month ago. Well I'll quote first. So listen, I'm quoting.

Three - B - 5

Martian space ships appear as blinking lights in the area directly around the moon. They are visible for ten minutes at a time with intervals of fifteen minutes in between.

Unquote.

So I am sitting in the living room on the couch trying to squeeze out a story from my rock head. It is that kind of morning when you feel like melting the typewriter into a solid

bar and clubbing yourself to death with it.

I am turning out a story with dialogue that makes me cringe, a plot that makes me smote my lengthening brow, characterization that makes me, let's face it, vomit. My usual best.

I tear out the fifth sheet of paper and wing it into my gobbling wastebasket which is having a meal of it that morning. I sit there glumly mulling over the suicide apparatus inventory. I decide very soon that they are all too final.

To complete the scene Ava is in the kitchen making a pie. In the nursery crib little Hoagy needs a diaper change.

Unable to bear the silence which is my own brain sitting there like a dead lump of jello, I click on the radio. Soon I catch the tail end of a gripping five minutes news. The man says corn and wheat are up two points and trading is irregular.

I make a careful note of this to tell my ten stock brokers and change the station. I come on the rear end of another five minutes news program. In the morning the air is stink-

TO THE EDITOR



ing with five minutes news.

"And these blinking lights," intones the commentator, "were visible for ten minute periods. Further investigations of this unusual phenomenon are being conducted by various astronomy groups around the country.

"And elsewhere on the stock market corn and . . ." click went the set.

I AM overburdened with creative woes and am not otherwise fascinated by the state of corn and wheat on the stock market.

That's right. I don't notice it. To another this might prove surprising. But you know me Bill. Someone would have to bend over and tell me before I realize that a truck has run over me. I am young and healthy and wide awake like all good Americans. But that doesn't mean we can notice anything.

It is not until lunchtime in the breakfast nook.

I am slurping soup and reading a two weeks old Sunday New York Times which I am just catching up with. Little Hoagy is whacking the bejesus out of his mush with a table-spoon. Ava is saying knock it off Hoagy or we'll enlist you in the infantry and don't think they won't take you.

I drop the paper and flick on the little white radio on the shelf.

Tschaikowsky's Sixth dies a slow death and then comes guess what, another five minutes news. The man says:

"Scientists and government authorities are still investigating the strange blinking lights seen last night around the moon. These lights appeared for ten minutes at a time with fifteen minute intervals in between. Rumors that the lights are from interplanetary aircraft have been strongly denied by government officials.

"Occurring simultaneously with these lights were wave signals received by Earth reception at half hour intervals. These signals could not be translated by any known wave codes.

"And, elsewhere, on the . . ."

I deposit a half eaten Yankee Doodle on the table and hie immediately to the livingroom. There I pull out my thick file entitled: *Mars*.

You know this file well, Bill. You know I spent a whole year building it up and, also, you know that I made the whole damn thing up out of my head.

Well I open my file to Section Three, Subhead B, Paragraph 5. And what gem of information greets my eyes?

I have already quoted it.

And that I say beats the cat's pajamas. So what am I, I ask myself, the Nostradamus of East Flatbush? I am undue disquieted. So I read on from *Three - B-15*.

Martian wave signals are received at intervals of thirty minutes during the period that the blinking lights are visible near the moon.

I SIT there in the midday sun reading the selection over and over. My lunch is not digesting. My heart is slamming a heavy door once and again. I am personally incited to pinch my leg. Ouch, I say, realizing with a juicy shudder that the whole screwball business has all the god-awful elements of fact.

"Here," I say to myself, "here I am a poor but untalented science-fiction writer. I am sitting here on the lumpy couch paid for in seven installments, one of them exceptionally tardy which made the credit manager wax pop-eyed. And I have assembled this mass of fact on Mars out of the barren wastes of my own numbskull.

"I say to myself when the file is complete: Now I have fifty years of source material for my series of epics about that old bloodshot planet Mars. I am happy. Harry, my agent, is happy. You are happy. We are all happy and clapping our hands and dancing around the maypole in our shorts.

"So comes today and one of my imaginations is vindicated."

Ava comes in then to inquire if I am preparing myself for the loony bin talking to myself.

"You're snake-pitting?" she says brightly.

"I'm cracking," I say, "Here. Sit down by papa's trembling side."

I show her the particular excerpt. This is it, I tell her, the axe is falling.

"You're coked," she sympathizes

and leaves for the kitchen to hog-tie Hoagy who is playing skeet shoot with the Harlequin dishes.

I sit a while. Then I shrug and I put the file back on the shelf. I return to the kitchen and complete my effort at eating.

Listening to my beloved child howl his Pabulum down his gullet I think carefully of this odd coincidence.

I think further of my file.

Section Three is entitled *Martian Declaration of War Against the Various Planets*.

Subhead A is entitled *Declaration Against Venus*. As you recall it is subhead B I quote to you.

Guess what that is?

WELL, Bil, shock is like a fire. You got to add fuel or it goes out. I have a few sleepless nights. I call up N.Y.U. and Columbia and Brooklyn Colleges and a few others. I ask for the astronomy professors. I don't know why I call them. I just have to let somebody know. No use telling the President; he's busy enough with Russia and Republicans. So I try the astronomy profs.

They aren't much help. Three of them say meteors. Two of them say comets. One, wouldn't you know it, says mass hysteria. In the middle of the night when nine tenths of the people are asleep he calls it mass hysteria. Ah well. Who knows, I figure. If they say the signals are from sun eruptions I'll swallow it. Why not? You think I'm anxious to

believe I am an everloving seer?

So, like I say, I forget about it. I write two more stories on Mars in the next week. I send them to Harry. He sells them to you.

Then, one morning, I am in the creative horse latitudes again, no winds of inspiration in my flabby sails. The air is crackling with silence. I am in the throes of nothing.

Once more I seek a whiff of solace on the radio. I turn it on. A man is talking through a mouthful of crumb bun and instant coffee.

"Say Bella," he says and I know I am listening to a Mr.-and-Mrs.-cliche - over - the - breakfast - table program. "Say Bella," he says again. Bella is either asleep or has fallen dead over her french toast.

"Yah," she says then, gagging and swallowing a cheese-covered English muffin whole.

"I see those crazy rumors about men from Mars are cropping up again. Shades of Orson."

"Yeah?" says Bella. High class conversationalist, I note.

"Yup," the man continues pausing for a quick slurp of coffee which he swallows so loud I even taste it.

"Yes, Bella," he gasps, "they say that those lights are definitely but definitely space ships. Walter Provincial says right here in his column:

"What Wyoming Air Force Station picked up one of those Lunalights on their radar screen and tracked it at—get this Bella — at better than five thousand miles per

hour? Maybe the God of War is going to take us on personally this time. Here's hoping.'

"How do you like that Bella?"

"Wow," says Bella, buttering her left hand.

"And that ain't all," the man continues, taking time out for playing suction pump again with his java, "There's an archeology prof out at Lichen University who says that the radio signals received break down under a code table he found in an ancient Egyptian tomb."

"What!"

THAT wasn't Bella. That was me and I was ready to swallow a haystack. My heart slowly sees that I'm not really meaning to cough it out and sinks down from my throat. I jump up like a kangaroo in trousers and take down my file. I'm sweating. Because why? Because this.

Three

B. Performance.

1. *Martian military spacecraft are capable of speeds ranging from a cruising velocity of 200 miles per hour to top speeds in excess of ten thousand miles per hour.*

And that includes five thousand miles and over.

Not so devastating? Right. If it was alone. But here's the clincher. Hold on to something.

Five - D - 7

Martian exploring parties landed on Earth during and following the year 1600 B.C. They placed in var-

ious locations, metal tablets on which were inscribed tables for the translation of their wave code. For instance, after the reign of Thothmes III tablets were placed in the tombs of one hundred different Egyptian notables.

Egyptian tombs. My God, I say, I'm getting scared of myself. I get an inclination to climb to the top of the open venetian blinds, pull the cord and slide to my death.

I sit in what can be acknowledged as a coma for some minutes. In the beyond I hear Ava yelping for me to take something somewhere and do something to it.

She comes in after becoming hoarse and putting her hands on her ample hips, says kindly, "You're deaf maybe?"

"Come here," I say in the voice of the prophet, "Sit beside me. This is grim."

"No, I'm busy."

I am stubborn. She sits. I tell her. I quote to her selected readings from my file.

"So?" she says.

"So!" I cry, "*You're deaf maybe!* Don't you realize what this means? Those things I read to you I made up. And they're true, true!"

"How could they be true if you made 'em up?" she asked with logic.

"I don't know," I say in a stage whisper. I look over my shoulder. "Maybe," I tell her, "maybe all those stories were dictated to my subconscious by Martians. Maybe every single story I printed is the truth. Maybe, by God, I'm a cosmic

publicity man without knowing it!"

"Can it junior," she says, like the patient lovable lump she is.

"They're declaring war on the Earth. They're going to fight us!"

"What for?" she said and walked away. "Don't forget the laundry," she calls back.

And that's all the help I get from the little woman.

IT is several weeks now since my automatic system has had the hell kicked out of it. I am in the elevator of the Shill Building riding up to see Harry, your favorite agent and mine.

He lets me in free and we sit looking at each other after shaking hands.

"What flea has gotten loose in that empty sepulchre under your hair?" he inquires with the gentility of an ulcered lobster.

"I have great news for you," I say, "IMAGINATION has been printing history these last five years."

"What are you raving about?" he says.

I give him the facts succinct and back-breaking. He assumes the complexion of a snow man as I tell him how my congressman didn't answer my telegram and the civilian defense director files my appeal under *Wastebasket*.

So I finish. "That is present laughter," I tell him, "What goes now? Do we compete with *The Infantry Journal*?"

He sits quietly, gnawing on the chewed up knuckles, his bushy eyebrows dusting off the rim tops of his shell glasses. I sink into a like reverie.

Soon he looks up at me.

"We have to face it," he says, "Bill Hamling has told his readers time and again that IMAGINATION presents the best in fiction. Now we are all liars. But maybe he can inaugurate a series of articles and tell the people the facts of the case."

He checks a pad.

"You can let Bill have the first article before next Wednesday?" he asks.

"But," I say, "You don't seem to realize that, well, *this is war*."

"When the hell isn't it?" Harry says, "Now to details."

SO I come home. I sit down alone in the house. Ava is at Prospect Park Zoo with Hoagy says the note on the typewriter.

Dreading the move, I turn on the radio. I hope for music. I get the last gasp of *Don Juan* by Gluck. I hold tight. Comes a five minutes news. I clench my fists like a malnourished Jack Dempsey.

"Astronomers over the country have reported a definite massing of the mysterious blinking lights by the moon. The lights are now visible during the day hours. Government officials are investigating carefully."

I turn it off. I stare at the walls. Investigating carefully. This is fine news. I think how fine it is as I

drag down my file and look at Section Fifteen.

B - 3

For a period ranging from 50-500 hours, Earth time Martian spacecraft will assemble around the moon until ready.

Ready for what do I hear you ask?

This section is entitled, I shudder to say it:

Martian Invasion of Earth.

So here I am, a writer accursed. According to my files which I made up out of nothing, some morning soon ships will surround Earth and set up a non-penetrable wave screen around themselves. Then the troop globes will come down, said troops armed with weapons that disintegrate anything within a half mile.

This section, Fifteen, was the one I compiled last. I figured to use it about the fiftieth year of my writing career. I even picked a tentative title for the last story. I think I'll change it. It's *Earth's End*.

Well my tale is most unwound Bill. That's the ticket. I can't very well write anymore. Not a bloody word. I just sit around and mull things over.

So you see you better get another boy. Why? Gawdamn man, now that my files are all factual, *what in the hell am I going to write about?* You know I can't do non-fiction.

Regretfully,
Dick.

* * *

Editor's Note:

The above letter certainly sounds like a good gag. And we, like the rest of you readers enjoy a practical joke once in a while. Martians about to invade, indeed! We listen to the radio quite a bit and we haven't heard a single report of lights clustering around the Moon—have any of you?

So ok, Dick's letter is a joke . . .

But we noticed one funny thing we could check on. Remember Dick said IMAGINATION had been published for five years? That got us thinking. So we took a look at the date of the letter and the postmark. They were the same. The envelope is postmarked November 6, 1955.

Now how did the post office ever make such a silly mistake?

—The Editor.

THE END

In Some Dark Corner . . .

BEFORE you look superciliously down the long end of your scientific nose and start to laugh at superstitions, throw your mind back five hundred or a thousand or two years. Superstition doesn't seem funny if you imagine your mind blanked clear of all the accumulated knowledge it is heir to. Superstition seems in that case as cold and as logical as a milking machine!

Early Man was immersed in a jungle of mystery — everything around was mysterious and un-understandable. What did he know of natural laws, of cause and effect? And because he took so long to develop the so-called scientific way of looking at things, he substituted, what to him, was perfectly rational and what we call "superstitions."

There are some perfect examples of this current in peoples today and exactly like peoples of that long gone day. For example, Australian aborigines, who are still primitive, ignorant (unknowing) and unaware of event and reaction, have a language rich in allusions to the superstitious explanation of things. Their word for *shadow* is the same as

spirit.

Indian tribes describe a person's soul as his "shadow." And among African natives it is firmly believed that a man's shadow leaves his body after death. The classic belief that the dead man—especially the zombie or vampire—casts no shadow is current among all ethnic groups.

Instead of ridiculing such attitudes, we should properly be inclined to say that the beliefs we call superstitions are really early *hypotheses*, primitive explanations of observed fact.

The myths and legends of antiquity are rich in superstitions, but they have a curiously fascinating quality. Our own love of fantasy elements in stories and in movies testifies to the ever-popular aspect of superstition and "auto-wish to be thrilled." Today, more than ever, in a world so coldly scientific and rational, with an explanation for everything in firm unyielding mathematics, we find warmth and comfort in allowing ourselves for a brief span, to be immersed in the timeless fascination of fantasy . . .

RETURN ENGAGEMENT

By
Margaret St. Clair

The Earthman made the mistake of breaking a law on the alien world. Naturally he had to be chastised — in a manner to suit the aliens!

“THE ingratitude of humans,” McBream said broodingly, “is amazing. Loan a Martian a couple of I.U.’s when he’s in a spot, and he’ll send you greeting cards on the anniversary for the rest of his life. Fish a



terrestrial out of the water when he's drowning, and he sends you a bill from the tailor for resurfacin' his suit. Passengers!" McBream spat in the direction of the lucite cuspidor.

I picked up the book from McBream's desk and examined it. It was beautifully printed on outsize sheets of silky preemitex, and bound in smooth, deep-garnet Vellumium. On the spine of the book, in shining miraloy, ran the words, FARQUARSON'S ENCHIRIDION OF

EXTRA - TERRESTRIAL COOK-ERY.

"This what you're so sore about?" I asked.

"Sore?" McBream snorted. "Who's sore? Only petty, small-souled individuals get sore at things. Me, I'm suffering from an attack of righteous wrath. I'm not vindictive, but I hope Farquarson chokes over one of his own recipes."

"The name sounds familiar," I ventured.



"It should be. Farquarson is culinary editor of *Pro Homine*, the super-sharp magazine for men. You must have heard of him. That book in your hand is supposed to be his masterpiece. Masterpiece!" McBream snorted again.

"It isn't as though he hadn't plenty of room for it," my friend continued in an aggrieved tone after a silence. "The first ten pages of the book are taken up with acknowledgments and expressions of gratitude—you know, stuff like, 'My deep thanks, too, are due to Logarithmia McCloy for her skillful and patient typing of this book's manuscript.' And it's dedicated to his hexapod, Waldmeister Schnitzel V. Luftraumzug, 'My six-legged friend and constant companion.' But does he mention Joseph McBream, first mate of the *S. S. Tisiphone*, anywhere in it? Just once? Just one single time? He does not. And yet, if it hadn't been for me that book would never have been written."

"Did you help him with the recipes?" I asked.

"I did not," Joseph returned decisively. "I'm no greasy groon-slinger. The recipes in the ENCHIRIDION—agh, what a flossy way to say handbook—came out of Farquarson's own little head. No, I didn't help him with the recipes. I only saved his life."

"Tell me about it," I said.

"HE got on the *Tisiphone* at Marsport," Joseph McBream

said, "with a sky-blue hexapod, four robot porters to carry his luggage, and a beautiful blonde secretary who couldn't spell even using phonemes. About half his stateroom was taken up with cooking stuff. He had pressure vats and tenderizers and relayed casseroles, more damned junk than you ever saw outside a museum. He probably had a couple of alem-bics and an athanor. It was all of it breakable, and the Old Man told everyone on board to be careful of it. Farquarson was some dynast's brother-in-law, and he didn't want to go offending him."

"What was he like personally?" I queried.

"Farquarson? Oh, dignified. God-awful dignified in a loose-jointed intellectual sort of way. He always wore sports clothes and talked with a sort of lazy drawl. His manners were beautiful. Everybody on board hated him.

"The first night out he got into a fracas with the cook about the proper way of barbolizing bollo ribs. Marno, being half-Venusian, was a sort of excitable gesell anyhow, and pretty soon we heard noises like everything in the galley had been thrown on the deck and was being jumped up and down upon. It practically was, too, and though of course all that stuff is made of Fraxex, the bollo ribs got badly burned while the discussion was going on. All we had for dinner that night was clear soup, vigreen salad, and a sweet.

"The second night out of Mars-

port Farquarson came to my cabin—Johnny and I were bunking together then—and said he had a request to make. He'd been told, he said, that 'spacies' (I wish you could have heard him trying to use slang; it made you feel like there was a skin growing over your teeth)—that 'spacies' had a special drink they, ah, manufactured surreptitiously on certain occasions when they were in space. Its name he, ah, believed, was jet juice. Did we know anything about it? Could we furnish any information concerning it to him?

McBREAM paused. His lips had drawn down in a sour grimace. It was obvious that he had become absorbed in memories as unpleasant as a dose of picrin would have been.

"And did you?" I prompted.

"To the everlasting discredit of our common sense, we did. Afterward, when Johnny and I talked it over, we couldn't understand what had got into us. It wasn't as though either of us liked him; and we knew perfectly well how the Old Man felt about jet juice on board his precious *Tisiphone*. We acted like a couple of girls from the satellites all overcome by the glamorous lights of the big space port. Farquarson must have hypnotized us with his fine emporium clothes and his lazy drawl. An' the worst of it was, it was a wonderful batch of juice.

"I don't think I ever made a tastier. It had some bilial berries and kono shoots in it I picked up in Aphrodition, and the usual assort-

ment of Martian fungi and grains. Just before we'd left Terra I'd had an inspiration and I'd put in three mangosteens and a big piece of durian. They were to give it body and depth. Then of course we revved the mixture up with a bottle or two of soma and some cocla extract, and put it away to stew in a dark corner of the hold in free flight, away from the artigravs. It came out a kind of cloudy peach green, smooth as satin and warm and deep and rich. It was a wonderful batch.

"Johnny got a bottle from under his bunk, where he kept it inside his depilating kit, and poured Farquarson a drink. The old yap tasted it and his eyebrows went up. 'Extraordinary!' said he. 'Ah—could I have some more?'

"From first to last he finished two and three-quarter bottles of the drink. When he went to his little bed that night, he was floating up to his ears. He kept talking about the deadly paididion that was following him, and wanting Johnny to let him come to grips with it.

"The next day the Old Man came down on us like a ton of osmium. He called us up to the bridge and said things that—well, I'm not a young man any more, but they made me feel like I was about fifteen, and Johnny had tears in his eyes before he was done. Then he sent a couple of crewmen into the hold and they smashed the carboy and poured out the juice. One of them told me afterward that there were tears in *his* eyes, too.

"It seems that that black-hearted ape, Farquarson, had woke up with the hangover of the eon. Instead of taking his medicine like a little man, he'd gone loping to the captain for 'remedial agents.' And then, of course, the fat was frying merrily.

"To do Denis (that was Farquarson's first name, Denis) justice, I don't think he realized what he was letting us in for. The 'surreptitious' in the speech he'd made us about jet juice hadn't really registered with him. He probably thought the captain took a kind of 'spacies will be spacies' attitude with us.

"But Zinck fined us each two months' pay and ordered us confined to quarters except for necessary duty until we hit the first of the Rafts in the Ring. The confinement to quarters was all right, bein' disciplinary, but the pay docking, bein' financial, shouldn't have been imposed without a board meeting, an' we took it up with the union. There was months and months of rowing, and at the end the board affirmed Zinck's fine and slapped another month's penalty on us on its own account."

There was a dispirited silence. "About your saving his life . . ." I murmured.

McBREAM brightened. Plainly I had touched on a more pleasant segment of his recollections. The corners of his mouth, which had been austere turned downward, began to right themselves. "Oh, that," he said.

"In order to know what happened,

you got to know what the set-up was. Farquarson had already 'coped with' the cookery of the terra-type planets, and done what he could with the farther, bigger ones. It's pretty hard to get chummy with the inhabitants of Jupiter, even if their food was adapted to human digestions, and I notice Farquarson has only three Jovian dishes in his book. But anyhow, he was finishing up with the fringes, the cookery of the satellites, and he'd booked passage on the *Tisiphone* because we touched at so many of them.

"Like I said, he was related to some dynast with a lot of tug, and the Old Man, after checking with an inspector at Marsport, agreed to let him have the use of the yellow life craft when he wanted it. It was sort of against regulations, but not too much.

"The craft's bein' yellow was important. Conformably to regulations, all the *Tisiphone's* life craft were painted in the psychological primary colors, to make assigning personnel to them for evacuation easier, and all of them carried two paint bombs to 'provide adequate means for prompt renewal of said paint, pigment, enameloid, or tint.' You want to keep your eye on those paint bombs, because they come into the picture later on.

"Well, Farquarson got along all right on the first couple or so satellites. He didn't speak anything except terrestrial languages, which was rather a handicap, and there never were any interpreters. He laid the

fact that he was sick as a dog three or four times from things the natives gave him to eat, to difficulties of communication. Myself, I thought somebody got annoyed with the trick he had of looking down his nose and bleating 'Oh, rea-l-ly?' every few minutes, and decided to take direct action.

"Anyhow, he was still in pretty good condition when we got to Iapetus. Iapetus is under a universal dome. The first day he spent mooching around the port and buying things in native markets, but the next day he asked for the life craft and started off by himself. We didn't think he'd get into any trouble. He wasn't the soul of tact, of course, but the Talipygiars are usually a pretty mild bunch, good-tempered and fond of a joke."

"Talipygiars?" I asked.

"The secondary inhabitants of Iapetus. You can't photograph them easily, because they're partly electrical energy, and they're practically impossible to describe. They look like big maroon hedgehogs, as much as anything, with erectile electric crests over their heads, and lots of white sharp teeth.

"**WE** were having supper on board the *Tisiphone* when Sparks came in and spoke to the Old Man. He'd happened to be running over the afternoon wire on the re-producer, and he'd come across Farquarson's call for help. The blasted idiot hadn't sent it in code, which would have automatically set up

alarm signals, he'd just yelled 'Help!' into the 'phone a couple of times, and he hadn't even thought to give his position when he did it.

"Well, I got sent. In a way, it was a logical choice, because I knew as much as anybody on board about the Talipygiars. Extra-terrestrial anthropology's always been a sort of hobby of mine. The beauteous blonde secretary was having hysterics and the hexapod was howling its head off in sympathy when I left. Just before I zoomed, Zinck said something in a stern voice about expecting me to return with Farquarson alive and in good condition, or he'd consider it a breach of discipline. He knew I didn't like him.

"I had a real devil of a time finding Denis. We get in the habit of talking as if a planet were about the size of California, and a satellite no bigger than an amusement park. Take it from me, that's nothing but pure woola wash. A satellite the size of Iapetus seems as big as Terra itself when you're hunting a small object on it, and that life craft was only about five meters long. Iapetus has mountains and rivers and woods and ravines and all sorts of stuff. I had object detectors, of course, but Iapetus has lots of ore-bearing rocks, and anyhow, detectors are of very little use unless you're near the thing, and I had no idea where it was. I put in nearly fourteen hours hunting before I found the craft, and even then it was just luck that I stumbled on it.

"It was down in a gully on the

edge of some woods. Everything looked peaceful and quiet, and Farquarson wasn't anywhere about. I hovered for a while and thought it over, and then decided to land.

"I had side arms, of course, but I wasn't planning on using them. For one thing, Farquarson might just have turned his ankle and considered it a catastrophe which warranted sending a call for help, and for another, the Talipygians are protected by interplanetary law. They've been classified as a 'non-humanoid species of limited intelligence,' and that means that if you bother one of them all hell pops loose. Quite right, too." Joseph's manner was solemn. "The non-human species of the system are one of our greatest natural resources.

"BUT as I was saying, I decided to land. I came down easy on quarter-jet, got out, and started toward the yellow life craft. I heard a noise in the brush and turned to look. And the next thing I knew, there I was inside the life craft with my head aching like I'd been drinking eagle spit.

"I figured out later that one of the Talipygians had knocked me out with a discharge from his erectile electric crest. They hardly ever do it, because it's a psychic drain on them, and I'd overlooked the possibility of it.

"Farquarson was inside the craft, looking dignified and distressed. His hair was rumpled up and his nethers had completely lost their press. 'I'm glad you've come, McBream,' he said

as soon as my eyelids began flutter-in'. 'Perhaps the two of us can contrive some way out of this predicament.'

"I sat up moaning and holding on to my head. It hurt so much my eyes felt crossed. I could just make out, on the port side of the life craft, a cooking pot with a mess of some reddish stuff in it. My side arms, by the way, were gone. That's one of the things that makes me wonder if that phrase 'limited intelligence' in the description of the Talipygians is entirely justified.

"Anyhow, I helped myself up by pulling on the back of the pilot's seat. Farquarson watched me, his expression intellectual and lugubrious. 'What's been happening?' I asked.

"He shook his head. 'I don't quite know,' he answered. 'I landed the life craft in this spot, picked a quantity of an unknown deep red fruit, and was just trying it out in a dish to which I thought it would be suitable, when I discovered that I was surrounded by a number of large purple animals. They looked threatening. I managed to call "Help!" into the receiver, and then I was knocked unconscious. Stunned.

"When I recovered consciousness, I found that the craft had been disabled and the means of communication were gone. The animals, McBream, are still surrounding us.'

"I TOTTERED over to a viewing port and looked out. What I saw made my blood run cold. The

Talipygians were bumping around the life craft in a circle, sliding on their behinds the way they always do, and from time to time one of them would rear up and sort of shake his crest. It didn't look so alarming in itself, but as I said, I know a few things about the Talipygians, and that dance or whatever you'd call it is the thing a poetically minded anthropologist christened 'The Prelude to the Sacrifice.' I told you the Talipygians had lots of teeth.

"I can't imagine why they attacked me," Farquarson said in a querulous voice. "I was only engaging in cookery."

"I couldn't imagine, either. Usually all the Talipygians want is to be left alone. Then I had a sudden wild idea. I stumbled over to the cooking pot and looked in it. Heaven help us! Do you know what that double-barreled fool of a Farquarson had selected to cook?"

"No," I replied.

"A bunch of Tomato Babies."

McBream obviously expected me to be impressed with this piece of information. I struggled with it for a time and then gave up. "I never heard of them," I said.

"Never *heard* of them? What do they teach you kids on Terra nowadays? Why, when I was going to school we had course after course in extra-terrestrial subjects, and you couldn't graduate unless you got at least a passing grade in Solar History. No wonder people are only half-educated these days!" McBream

sounded outraged.

I had been thinking. "Wait, now," I said, "it seems to me I read a piece in a digest about the Tomato Babies a couple of years ago. Yes, I do remember. It was by a professor of Folklore in Ares City College, and he said that the myth of the Tomato Baby proved that the folklore theme of the external soul—you know, like the stories in Grimm about the giants who can't be killed because their souls are in magical eggs or crystals—that that theme was system-wide."

McBream looked at me. "It isn't a myth," he said with a hint of indignation, "it's perfectly true. The Folklorist who wrote that article didn't know what he was talking about. The Tomato Babies are a big red ovoid fruit that grows on floppy vines in a few odd places on Iapetus. They're hollow inside, and the Talipygians put their souls in them."

"Hunk?"

"WELL, more or less their souls. You remember I told you the Talipygians were hard to photograph because they were partly electrical energy. When one of them is sick or wounded, the others take his soul out—the electrical part of him—and put it inside one of these fruits. The Tomato Babies, as far as we can find out, are a sort of natural Leyden jar. Or maybe more like a storage battery. Anyhow, the point is that a sick Talipygian doesn't have to suffer for months and months while he's getting well. His electrical component is popped into

one of these containers, and his body can devote itself quietly and painlessly to the business of recovering."

"And you mean Farquarson cooked—?" I asked, boggling.

"Yes. Of course after the containers had been destroyed, the electrical charge was lost. It wasn't quite as bad as murder, because the Talipygians say that when their personal electrical charge is released, it reshapes itself into a higher form; all the same, Farquarson had wiped out twenty or thirty relatives and friends of the beings who were bumping around outside the life craft in their sacrificial dance. When the electrical charge is dissipated, the bodies wither away. No wonder the Talipygians were sore.

"I wobbled back to the viewing port and looked at them. I'd always thought they were quiet, harmless creatures, for all their nearly human size; now they seemed to be all teeth. I'd never realized before what particularly vicious lower jaws they had.

"The thing to do was to try to get into communications with them. Now, I don't speak Talipygian. In my opinion, nobody does, though you'll meet a few space rats who'll tell you they could write a grammar of it. But the traders on Iapetus have worked out a system of conventionalized signs, noises, and so on, for talking to the Talipygians, and it works well enough most of the time.

"I began trying to attract their attention, making burp noises and

wriggling my hands. For a long time they went on just as if they didn't notice me. Then one of them, a faint shade bigger than the rest, left the circle of bumpers and came and stood in front of me. His teeth were bigger, too. (I say 'his' but it might have been 'her' or 'its'—all I could really be sure of were the teeth.)

"At first I tried to apologize and explain. The Talipygian listened for a while and then made the noise that means 'No.' He wasn't interested. Then I tried threatening. I told him there'd be space cruisers hunting us, punitive expeditions, all that sort of thing. He didn't say anything at all this time, but I had the impression he was bubbling over with laughter inside.

"**H**E was perfectly right, of course. Humanoid citizens of the system are supposed to know their rights and liabilities in dealing with non-humanoid species. If Farquarson had got into trouble with the Talipygians, it was strictly his own lookout. Under the circumstances, if they carved us up, all the government would do would be to send regretful letters to the names in the 'whom to notify' spaces in Farquarson's and my dossiers.

"Bribery was the idea I got next. I turned my pockets out for trinkets and attractive junk. I waved a hunk of fossilized edelweiss and one of those 'Halmjin' crystal games that were so popular last year in his face. No soap.

"The Talipygian flapped his flip-

pers, erected his crest, and said 'gunk' a couple of times. That meant, why bother? He'd get all of our belongings anyhow after we were dead.

"Finally I asked him what they were planning to do with us. Eat us, the answer came back like a flash. Of course I'd known it before, but it still was a little disconcertin'. I'm not quite sure, but I think he said he was sorry I'd get eaten along with Farquarson. He couldn't help it, though.

"I went back inside the life craft and sat down to think. I was dead tired from all the work I'd put in hunting for Farquarson earlier, and my head still ached. And Farquarson kept dancing around me asking idiotic questions and wringing his hands.

"I pulled out of my mind all I'd ever heard about the Talipygian character, and went over it. It wasn't much. They were said to have mild, peaceable natures, lay eggs, engage in ritual dances now an' then as a prelude to slaughtering the local animals, and be fond of a good laugh. The mild and peaceful nature wasn't much in evidence just at present; the eggs weren't relevant; we were going to take the place of the local animals in the sacrifice, and how did the sense of humor help? I couldn't tell them funny stories in sign language, could I?

"As far as that went, I'd only seen a Talipygian amused once. That was when we were in port on Iapetus on the trip before. A fat Venusian had been comin' down the steps of

the Tashkent Import and Export Exchange. He'd slipped on the top step and gone all the way down to the bottom, touching only the third and eighteenth steps on the way. It had been quite spectacular. Of course he'd had to go to the hospital afterward and have five stitches taken, but the Talipygian couldn't have known that at the time. Maybe it wouldn't have made any difference if he *had* known—I had a feeling that his people liked their humor practical and rough.

"Farquarson came up to where I was sitting with my head in my hands, and nudged me. 'They're moving faster,' he said in a nervous tone. 'Those things on the tops of their heads are flashing more and more frequently. Do you suppose it means anything?'

"**I** WENT over to the port fast, and looked. Just as I'd feared, it meant all too much. Judging from the signs, the Talipygians were getting ready to make ritual hash of us.

"I tell you, I was desperate. Of course we could, and would, make a rush for it, but there were forty or fifty of them to two of us; we were unarmed, and each and every Talipygian could deliver a stunning electric shock. I could feel my mind giving off loud clicks like a Geiger counter near a rich source. What to do, what to do? Then my eyes lit on the rack holding the bomb with the yellow paint.

"Inside two minutes I had all the clothes off Farquarson except his sli-

skin shorts. At first he was too surprised to complain, even though he turned out to have a considerable paunch. But when I took the paint bomb and began paintin' big bright daisies on his shoulders, back, and tummy-tum, he started to heat up; and when he found out what my idea was, he really did get talky and obstreperous. 'I won't do it,' he said vigorously, 'I absolutely refuse. Not before these animals. Have you no conception, McBream, of dignity? I'd rather—' he glanced out of the port toward the toothy Talipygians and winced a little—'I'd rather be dead.'

"I tried to be reasonable with him. 'Listen, Denis,' I told him, 'it's absolutely immaterial to me whether they eat you or not. In fact, I'm all in favor of their cutting you up in little pieces for a mess of shis-kebab. It would be the finest thing to happen to the System since the discovery of Alpha-Omega power. Jet juicer!' (My feelin's overcame me a little when I thought of all the trouble Farquarson had got me in.) 'But if they eat you, they eat me too, for a side dish, and we can't have that. On your way! Get!' I had to give him a push or two, but he got."

"A push?" I queried. Joseph's narrative was becoming interesting.

"With my foot. It was all to the good, I think—it limbered him up. Well, we went outside the life craft, hesitated a second or so, and went into our dance.

"I was prepared to do my part. I'd painted big yellow flowers all

over myself too, and I didn't mind how big a fool I looked, provided it saved my life. But it was plain right from the start that Farquarson, reluctant as he was, was the star of the show. The Talipygians hardly noticed me. They stopped bumping almost immediately and clustered around Denis with their crests popping off and on like space port signal lights.

"That guy really had talent. The idea of him writing a cook book with a fancy title when he could perform like that! After he got started he jumped up and down like one inspired, and once when he fell down, probably accidentally, you could have heard the noise the Talipygians made applaudin' with their flippers on the other side of Iapetus. Funny! Why, he'd have made a fortune on the stereo. All he needed was a little well-timed encouragement."

"Encouragement?" I questioned.

JOSEPH cast down his eyes. "Well, you know," he said vaguely, "things . . . After a while the Talipygians themselves got the idea, an' whenever Farquarson showed signs of slowin' down they shot long, slow, low-voltage sparks out of their electric crests at him. One missed him once and hit me instead; it was just like being stuck with a long, sharp pin.

"Pretty soon Farquarson got so warm the daisies on his tummy began runnin'. The Talipygian chief gooped and guggled and geeked at me until I got the idea and fetched

the bomb and painted them on real bright again. I had to renew his daisies three times before we got out of there."

McBream's expression was smug and self-satisfied. He looked like a weetareete which, having finished a jug of bovula cream on one side of a theo table, knows that there is another jug, equally full and equally accessible, on the other side.

"But what finally happened?" I asked.

"Well, the blue and green life craft from the *Tisiphone* came after us. Zinck was on the blue one himself—he thought it was that important. Farquarson was doin' splits and then jumpin' high up in the air, almost to the dome, when they got there. The daisies on his tummy were good and bright.

"Zinck got out of the blue craft, trying hard to keep from smiling, and presented his compliments to the head Talipygian. They glooped and gunked for a minute or two, an' then any remainin' signs of a smile disappeared from Zinck's face. For the trouble was this. The Talipygians didn't want to let Farquarson go.

"The conversation went something like this: Zinck: 'Gloop. Wheepee. Geet.' Intricate wiggle of hands.

Talipygian: 'Nee. Neeeee.'

Farquarson: 'What is happening, McBream?'

Me: 'Be quiet.'

Zinck: 'Gleed! Damn it, Gleed!' (turning to us) 'They say they're going to hold him as recompense for all their relatives he murdered.'

Farquarson: 'It was purely an accident!'

Zinck: (scurlly) 'You should have been more careful, Mr. Farquarson, really you should — 'Gleep. Wheepies. Blee.'

"The upshot of the matter was that Zinck negotiated a contract with the Talipygians. They agreed to release Denis on condition —" here McBream seemed to be smacking his lips — "on condition that he return on the same date each year and perform for them. His costume, it was expressly stipulated, was to be the same, includin' the daisies.

"Farquarson didn't cut up as rough about the terms of the contract as I'd expected him to. I think he had the idea that a contract between a human an' a non-humanoid species wouldn't be legally binding. But when we got back on the *Tisiphone*, Zinck explained to him that such contracts are always made between the human on the one hand and the Interplanetary Government, acting for the non-humanoid species, on the other. Bindin'! It was more bindin' than a barrel full of nuclear-bond glue."

"And does he—?" I murmured after a silence.

"Yes, every year. He'll be leaving for Iapetus day after tomorrow for his annual pilgrimage. He always gets a lot of bon voyage gifts. Funny, isn't it? He begged Zinck and me—especially me — to keep the terms of the contract quiet, and Zinck said he would. But like I said Farquarson always gets a lot of bon

voyage gifts and— isn't it odd? — they're always flowers. Baskets and baskets and baskets of daisy flowers."

The corners of McBream's mouth, which had been somewhat elevated, began to turn down again. "But is-

n't it ungrateful?" he said indignantly. "After I saved his life and all that! Wouldn't you think mere elementary decency would have made him mention me in his book?"

"H'um," I said.

THE END

Letters from the Readers

Dear Editor:

This is the first time I've ever written to a big time magazine of any kind, and of course it would be to a science fiction one!

The Hinton cover on your September issue was pretty good, although it looked kind of like a Buck Rogers comic book. How about getting some Bonestell work for your covers?

Say! Let's have more of those FANTASY FILM FLASHES if any more good movies come out in our field. And how about getting Willy Ley to do some articles on space travel for you?

My favorite stories were in order: CRY CHAOS!, a good action filled story with an Alley Oop type of hero. THE MISTAKE OF CHRIS-

TOPHER COLUMBUS; it's about time somebody treated stf with a good bit of humor. THE ANSWER; great suspense and great surprise. A frightening end. I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS, fine and funny. MASTER RACE, cute, new plot, but it could have been handled better. WE'RE OFF TO MARS! I really place this above MASTER RACE; I just got mixed up in my rating. This is an old plot with a new twist.

Keep up the good work, as you're on an even keel with GALAXY, ASTOUNDING, & THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION.

By the way, I would like to correspond with some fans.

Russell Martin
817 Leroy Ave.

Rock Falls, Ill.
Glad to hear from you Russ. And we'll stay at the top, too, don't you worry. Just watch coming issues.
... with

ON BENDED KNEES, YET!

Dear Bill Hamling:

I have just put down the September issue of IMAGINATION, my first issue. On the whole it was simply wonderful. In my opinion it ranks with the best of them, from ASTOUNDING on down. The artwork is excellent, especially the cover. The contents page is very nice. It is a good idea to have the length of each story listed. The features are very good. I especially like FANDORA'S BOX, FANTASY FILM FLASHES, and the nice long letter section. I think the letters from hepped-up readers are the most interesting part of any magazine.

Now to get on with the stories. In the first place I choose MASTER RACE. It's a cute little fantasy that caught my fancy. A very close second is CRY CHAOS! a completely different type of story, a fast-moving science fiction adventure. It kept me on the edge of my seat and was awfully hard to put down. Next came WE'RE OFF TO MARS!, then HOLD BACK TOMORROW, a very powerful short story. Next would be the fantasy by Gault, I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS. THE ANSWER would rank nearer the top if it hadn't been for the horrible corny ending. It was an excellent story until Reeve answered the phone. Last and least comes the broken chain story, THE MISTAKE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS. The chain should never have been broken.

You have a fine stf magazine in Madge; keep it that way. It is a very well balanced magazine. That's

a thing many of your competitors don't have — balance. I have one small beef, however; exclude the science shorts.

Oh yes, before I forget, please don't run serials. I plead with you on bended knees, cut off your right arm before you run serials. They are the reason I do not read GALAXY.

Keep up the marvelous work and some day you won't have any competition worth worrying about. Again, congratulations.

Donald R. Sherbert

303½ Second St.

Wausau, Wisc.

At this point we'd like to report that in response to our editorial request you readers flooded us with your opinions on serials. They're still coming in, and we want you to continue to write your opinion if you haven't already done so. However, at the moment it seems the vote is against serials by more than 3 to 1. If it ends up this way you can bet we won't use serials ... with

WANTS EDD CARTIER

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I received and read the September issue of Madge. Very good. I liked CRY CHAOS! very much. THE MISTAKE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS was (I don't want to say cute, but—) good satire, anyway. I didn't care too much for THE ANSWER, but not bad. The rest were good, not exceptional, but good.

I like your features and your artwork is good although for me there is no illustrator in fantasy like Edd Cartier. Cartier humanizes all his illos so that the BEM's seem cute.

Keep up the good work on the stories and I'll be right with you. I'd

(Continued on Page 149)



RUN, LITTLE MONSTER!

by Chester S. Geier

Fran had heard about the monsters men hunted down and killed. But she had never seen one—until the night that Sammy looked at her and screamed . . .

THE girl ran like the hunted thing she was, her bare feet flashing over the lush spring grass. She sobbed with the effort of breathing, and her slight, immature body trembled with exhaustion beneath her ragged dress. Fear was a wild glitter in her eyes as she stared about her in search of refuge.

The two boys came racing in pursuit, yelling threats between labored snatches of breath.

"Stop, Fran!" Davey Becker panted. "You can't get away! We'll get you!" A thread of saliva stretched from his pendulous lower

lip, soaking into the front of his tattered shirt. He was a hulking figure with dull eyes set deep under a low forehead.

Sammy Becker was two years older than his brother, smaller and slimmer yet making up in cunning and a shrewish driving force what he lacked in bulk. At eighteen he was the acknowledged leader of the pair, an oddly young-old figure with wizened features and pale eyes that gleamed with sadistic urges.

"Stop!" he screeched. "You better stop, you crazy orphan! You'll be sorry!"



She knew better than to stop. Frequent torment at the hands of Sammy and Davey told her she could expect no mercy after having led them on this long chase. In despair she realized it had been a serious mistake to wander away from the house. Little enough protection was to be expected of Big Luke Becker, but for the most part he didn't allow his sons to bedevil her while the endless daily round of household chores remained to be done.

Briefly and poignantly she wished she had a father of her own—a real father to comfort her and keep her from harm. She had never known what her father was like. Vaguely she remembered having heard that he had died in the war. Her mother had told her that once, a long time ago—but even her mother was only a dim memory. A lot of people seemed to have died in the war—millions of them. She could not understand how there could ever have been that many people, for there did not seem to be many at all in the world she knew.

Darting a glance behind her, she saw Sammy and Davey were gaining. Frantically she searched the grassy field again, bright and still under the afternoon sun.

THERE seemed no place at all where she could hide. And she had to hide. A stabbing pain in her chest warned her she couldn't keep up her flight.

She didn't want Davey and Sammy to reach her. Not out here, with no one else around. She knew Sammy would beat her until her resistance was gone. Then he would run his sweaty hands over her, laughing shrilly and breathing hard. Sammy always managed it so that Davey was the one who held her. She shuddered. She didn't like the things Sammy did with his hands.

A short distance ahead she saw that the field rose in a ridge, and suddenly she recognized the spot. There was a ravine below the ridge, choked with brush. She would be able to hide here, at least until she had caught her breath and could run again.

She drew upon her last dregs of strength and urged her legs into a burst of speed. The ridge rose before her as she drew ahead of the two boys. She struggled up the slope, and the brush along the crest whipped at her legs and caught at her dress as she beat her way through it. She went down the opposite slope in staggering leaps. Near the bottom of the ravine she fell and rolled the last few yards until a wall of brush brought her up short.

She scrambled back to her feet. Bent low, she began darting through gaps in the brush, ignoring the branches that raked and lashed at her.

She heard a shout and caught a glimpse of Davey and Sammy on the ridge crest. Evidently they had seen her from above, but once down in

the ravine the brush would cut off their view and make their search difficult. She hoped to be well hidden by then.

Threshing, crackling sounds rose behind her as the boys scrambled down into the ravine. It was all somehow distant and unreal. A roaring filled her ears, and her head felt strangely light. The pattern of branches and leaves blurred smokily before her eyes.

At last she reached a shallow crevice on the opposite side of the ravine, screened by a clump of brush. It was hardly large enough to squeeze her body into, but it was the best hiding place she could find in what little time remained.

SHE pressed tightly into the crevice, trembling, her eyes shut. Davey and Sammy mustn't find her! She repeated the thought over and over, straining with a frantic intensity, as if she could avoid being discovered by force of will alone.

The dizzy sensation swept over her again. She had felt it before, though not as strongly as now. And she had realized it was produced by a serious change in her—a change announcing her emergence into womanhood. It had given her a new sense of being, an exultant awareness of power. But it was her weakness now.

The noise of hurrying footsteps and rustling branches came from a point frighteningly close. She heard Davey speak in a complaining tone.

"Aw, let's go home, Sammy. Fran's gone, and I'm tired of chasing her."

"She's around here somewhere," Sammy insisted in his nasal voice. "We'd of seen her if she tried to climb out."

He pushed at the bigger boy. "Come on, you addlebrained ox! Help me look. I'm not letting her get away, no sirree! When I get hold of her—"

Davey's usually vacuous face twisted in a scowl. "You're always making me do something, Sammy. I'm not going to run after Fran all day long. Why're you always after her? Whyn't you leave her alone?"

"She's a girl," Sammy returned. "Don't you know what girls are for, you bonehead?" His voice grew taunting. "Hey, you sweet on Fran? Golly, that's a tickler! Wait'll I tell the fellows in town. Davey's sweet on Fran! Davey's mooning over the orphan!"

"You . . . you stop that, Sammy!" Davey blurted. "You stop it or I'll hurt you."

"You hurt me and I'll tell the old man. I'll tell the fellows in town about Fran, too." Sammy became slyly truculent. "You better help me look. I'll tell on you."

"Aw, whyn't you leave me alone?" Davey muttered. His big shoulders slumped in defeat and listlessly he turned away to resume his part of the search.

BRANCHES crackled near Fran, and she grew rigid within her

meager hiding place. They mustn't find her, she thought again. They mustn't find her!

The crackling came nearer. She saw Sammy's head and shoulders as he made an opening in the brush curtain with his hands. For an instant he seemed to look directly at her. The breath seemed to catch in her throat and her heart gave a sickening lurch. Sammy looked mad, not laughingly devilish as he usually did when bent upon persecuting her. She was afraid to think of what Sammy would do when he was mad.

But incredibly he drew back and walked away. It seemed a miracle to her that she had escaped being seen. Her dress was of a nondescript shade, but her hair and the pale gleam of her skin should have given her away.

A little wonderingly she glanced at one of the slender arms that were pressed tightly against her sides. She stared, puzzled. The color of the skin was a dull brownish-gray, blending almost indistinguishably with the hue of the rock that touched it. A trick of the light she thought. It had to be that, for it had tricked Sammy.

The voices and the sounds made by the two boys grew fainter, dying away with distance. She peered cautiously from her place of concealment. Sammy and Davey had walked out of sight down the far end of the ravine. She waited until certain that Sammy had not set a trap of some sort, then slid out of the crevice

and hurried toward the ravine's opposite end.

Her legs ached protestingly, but she forced herself to run. She realized she had been away from the house much too long. Big Luke would be angry—and his anger manifested itself in heavy blows of his big, bony hands.

THE Becker house was a large frame building, weather-beaten and fallen into disrepair. Fran hated the sight of it, but it was the only home she could recall having had. Once, during a summer evening in town, Fran had heard a group of men talking about Luke Becker. She had kept in the shadows at the side of the general store, and they hadn't seen her. The Becker house, it seemed, had once been owned by a prosperous farmer, a lonely widower whose sons had died in the war. Big Luke, a refugee from the city after the first atom bomb raids, had taken shelter at the house with his two small sons.

Fran's mother had taken shelter there also, and stayed on. There had been no place else to go. None of the refugees ever went back to the city, or to any of the other cities that had been bombed. There was a sort of light in the cities, a light you couldn't see. It burned you, and you died. The light had filled the ruined cities for a long time, and would continue to fill them for a long time to come. Men—the men who were left after the bombing raids—lived in small

towns now, and on farms. Farming was one of the few ways to make a living that were left.

The farmer who had taken Big Luke in had died. An accident, the man on the porch of the general store had said in his carefully low-pitched voice. And he had laughed without humor. One of the farmer's machines had killed him, and Big Luke had stayed on at the farm. It had been an unsettled time, men were law unto themselves, and Big Luke, with his powerful body, had gone unchallenged.

There was a hint of something evil in the story Fran had heard, suggested to her by the soft, meaningful tone of the man on the porch of the general store. She wasn't quite certain what it was, but she knew Big Luke was capable of anything sinister and cruel. And Sammy was very much like his father. Davey . . . well, Davey was not quite right in the head. She guessed Davey would be friendly enough in his own way, if Sammy didn't keep leading him on.

SILENCE lay over the house, extending to the couple of smaller buildings behind it and the big barn and the silos off to one side. Fran could see nothing of Davey and Sammy. She had been careful to avoid being discovered by them again, and evidently they had taken more time about returning.

She slipped into the kitchen. Big Luke was not there, but after a moment she heard the creak of

springs in the parlor, followed by shuffling footsteps. Big Luke appeared in the hall doorway, swaying unsteadily on his feet as he scowled at her. A sickly reek, familiar to Fran, announced that he had been drinking again. He always seemed to be drinking.

Big Luke had once been a heavy-fleshed man, but constant drunkenness had left him gaunt and shrunk-en. Dark hollows lay under his cheekbones, and loose skin sagged around his mouth. He looked at Fran with blood-shot eyes, his dark, unkempt hair streaked with gray and the sallowness of his face emphasized by a heavy growth of beard.

"You," he said, his voice rasping. "Where you been, girl? Why weren't you tending to your chores?"

"I . . . I was outside," Fran said. She moved slowly to put the kitchen table between the man and herself.

"Outside, eh?" He staggered forward, his gaze baleful. "Just where outside? I been yelling my head off for you. Where's Sammy and Davey?"

"They chased me!" Fran flared. "I walked a piece, and they started chasing me! They're always chasing me!" -

"And I bet you like 'em to chase you," Big Luke growled. "Don't try to fool me, you little snip. Don't try to tell me you ain't practicing your woman's tricks on my boys."

Fran felt a hotness leap into her

face. "I never do a thing to them!" she protested. "I hate them—Sammy especially. Why don't you tell him to leave me alone?"

"Uppity, just like your ma was, you little—" Big Luke abruptly leaned across the table, and his caloused palm shot out, making a sharp clap of sound as it struck Fran's cheek.

She felt her head jerk around from the force of the blow. The side of her face felt numb and large.

"Don't get sassy with me, girl!" Big Luke snarled. "And next time you go running off when there's work to be done, I'm going to fix you good and proper. You're big enough to take a whip to. I'll have the skin off you, by God!"

HE glared at her a moment longer, then turned and staggered back toward the parlor. Fran rubbed at her cheek, tears brimming in her eyes. She had a sense of rebellion—and hopelessness. She had often thought of running away, but no one in town would risk Luke Becker's wrath by taking her in. And the thought of fleeing to one of the other towns held possible dangers greater than those of her present life.

Her shoulders bowed in defeat and leaden resignation, she turned to the wood-burning stove. The fire had gone out, and the wood-box was almost empty. She sighed and started for the woodshed out in the yard.

Big Luke yelled after her, ob-

viously alerted by the creak of the kitchen door. "Where you running off to now, blast it?"

"To get some wood."

"Well, no more monkey-shines, if you know what's good for you!"

The shed was large and shadowy. The single window had been boarded up after the glass was broken. As Fran began heaping one arm with rough, chopped lengths of wood, she heard a quick shuffle of footsteps and saw Sammy crossing the yard toward the doorway. He still looked mad—even madder than he had been back in the ravine.

Her heart drumming, she drew back into the deeper shadows between the side wall and the stacked wood. She knew she was caught. Sammy evidently had seen her enter the shed. And Big Luke, angry with her too, could not be depended upon for help.

Yet oddly, a part of her, unfamiliar and mysterious, remained cool. That part of her waited for Sammy Becker, while the rest of her quailed his coming.

Sammy glided through the doorway, a vengeful twist to his mouth, his fingers curved talon-like to clutch. He stood for a moment, blinking his pale eyes after the brightness of the yard.

Then the rigidity went out of his fingers. His too-wise features wrinkled puzzledly.

"Hiding again, huh?" he half whispered, as though to reassure himself. "Well, I'll get you this time!

"I'll fix you good!"

He started forward, his hands outstretched.

FRAN watched him, a bewilderment growing in her. The shed was not too dark. It seemed incredible that Sammy could not see her crouching in the shadows at the end of the wood stack. But he groped at air with his hands, his movements always hesitant and uncertain.

It was inevitable that he should sooner or later stumble across Fran. She was ready. The piece of wood felt solid in her hand. She struck at Sammy's head, and he stiffened startledly at the very first movement, as though it had flashed out of nothingness itself, then lurched with a yelp against the wood stack. A small avalanche rained down on him, and Fran darted past and ran toward the house.

Davey was on the back porch with a dipper of water raised to his mouth. He stared at her with wide and somehow shocked eyes and remained frozen until she had entered the kitchen.

She realized that she had, despite everything, managed to keep a grip on the load of wood. She emptied it into the box at the side of the stove, and in doing so noticed a strangeness about the color of her arms. She peered at them, feeling as shocked and staring as Davey had looked, and her mind went back to the ravine and she remembered Sammy not seeing her even while he

looked directly into her hiding place. And he hadn't seen her in the shed. Why?

During supper Sammy was unusually quiet. He looked at Fran out of the corners of his eyes, and in his wizened face was a groping wonder—a vague fear.

Davey seemed to have forgotten his own experience. He forgot things quickly.

FRAN lay in her straw-padded bed with her eyes fixed on the rectangle of the window, glowing luminously with moonlight. She thought back over the events of the day, and a feeling of awe touched her. There was a significance to what had happened, a kind of tingling importance that she sensed but could not quite understand.

She felt that she had somehow . . . changed. She had entered into womanhood—but there was more to it than that. She felt stronger, more assured. Her very awareness seemed to have sharpened, to be reaching out and bringing her new impressions she could not identify.

She closed her eyes and sent her flowering perceptions out and away. For a moment she seemed to float in nothingness, disembodied . . . spreading. And then she had the sensation of touching something. She drew back, startled, yet fascinated and curious, like a child discovering some new wonder.

And a voice spoke to her, bell-like and ringingly clear—a voice which

in some incredible way she heard with her mind.

"Why, hello! Who is this?"

"I . . . my name is Fran."

"Oh, I understand. This is the first time for you, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said. "I mean, whatever this is, it never happened before."

In some odd way, the voice seemed to smile. "Don't let it frighten you, Fran. You'll get used to your new ability."

"But . . . but what does it mean? And who are you? Where are you?"

"You can call me Tom. I can't tell exactly where I am, because distances and locations have no meaning when a mind can reach anywhere. I don't think I'm very far away, though. As for what this means . . . well, that's a little difficult to explain, Fran."

THE voice — she knew now that it was more than just a voice — seemed to look out over an awesome vista, as if in search of some point of interest, some particular feature she could understand.

"You know about the war, Fran, and what happened to the big cities?"

"Yes. I've heard about that."

"Well, the war was fought with a new type of atom bomb, Fran. It was designed to keep people out of cities, because cities were centers of resistance. The bombs contaminated the cities with a deadly radiation that's still there. People had to

leave — but many of them were affected by the radiation, and gave birth to children that were . . . different. Some were monsters, Fran. And some . . . well, they didn't *look* changed, but they were — in strange and wonderful ways. It all depended on the intensity of the radiations that produced them, you see.

"You're one of those changed children, Fran — and so am I. Our ability to receive each other's thoughts proves that. But what you really should know is that there's serious danger in letting ordinary people find out you're different. Because, Fran, when the monsters started appearing they were done away with—killed. People were afraid of them. And they're more afraid now than ever."

The voice she had come to identify as Tom seemed saddened. "You see, Fran, the war was the product of a machine age. But men have gone back to the soil. They had to. There aren't many machines left any more, and there's no way to build them or keep them going. So they've been wearing out, breaking down. People used machines to communicate with each other and spread ideas and knowledge. Without the machines, their world has grown smaller. They're afraid of things that aren't part of it. And we aren't of their little world, Fran. We're . . . different. And for that reason they'll try to destroy us if they learn what we are.

"That mustn't happen, Fran. They've had their chance — and

they've failed. We have a right to ours, but it's a right we must fight for. We must stay hidden and keep from being found out until we're ready . . . So be careful, Fran. Don't let those around you discover your new abilities. They'll keep growing, I think. In some of us there's no way of knowing what heights will be reached."

"But isn't there something we can do?" she asked in silent, voiceless protest. "Isn't there some place we can go? Isn't there any hope for us at all?"

TOM'S answer was slow and grave. "There is hope, yes. But we must be patient. Mentally we're far beyond ordinary people, but physically most of us are still children. We need time to grow, time to attain our full powers. And we need time to find each other and plan for the future. We can afford to wait, Fran. But above all we must be careful.

"Right now, though, you'd better rest. You don't want to put too much of a strain on yourself the very first time."

Her mind leaped in dismay. "But, Tom—will I be able to reach you again?"

"You can reach me any time you send out your thoughts to me, Fran. Don't worry about that."

"All right, Tom." Sudden shyness made her falter. "I'm glad . . . glad I'm not alone."

"I understand . . . Good night,

Fran."

"Good night, Tom."

She lay still for a long while. She found she *was* tired, as though she had been under some exhausting nervous tension. But her pulse raced with excitement.

Carefully she went back over what Tom had told her, sifting the contents of his message for implications she might have missed. His warning became vivid in her mind, and abruptly, chillingly, she remembered the barking of dogs in the distance and men on horseback racing far-off across a field. She remembered a faint, triumphant baying and the muted thunder of guns. She remembered clutching in fright at her mother's hand and seeing Big Luke ride back to them across the yard.

An echo of his voice reached her over the years.

"Got another monster, by God!"

She remembered that had happened several times. She had thought monsters were horrible animals of some sort, but now she knew they were people, new and different people—like herself . . .

LATE summer sunshine lay over the porch in a flood of radiance as rich as melted butter. Fran stood very quietly for a moment, letting the warmth bathe her. She drew the fragrant morning air deep into her lungs and felt the breeze caress her face and arms. Her brown hair changed subtly in the light, became a gold-glinting auburn, and

a faint golden flush spread through her skin.

She was dimly aware of the pigmentation adjustment, but she did not try to control it just then. The chameleon effect, Tom called it, one of several protective devices that nature had furnished her kind for survival against the members of a hostile race. She let the impressions drift like smoke through her mind, releasing herself wholly to the beauty of the morning.

She arched forward on the tips of her bare toes, her slender body straining against the threadbare fabric of her dress to outline the firm, gently rounded curves of growing maturity. She had a feeling of vibrant, singing strength, as though she could launch herself with the effortlessness of a bird into the gold-hazed, green distance and soar tirelessly to the very end of the world. She had a depth and clarity of perception that seemed to her capable of embracing green earth and blue sky in one vast, magnificent sweep.

She had a delighted sense of freedom, as though released from the cocoon of hiding and caution in which she had kept herself during the past months. For a superb instant she felt free and gloriously happy — and she wanted to tell Tom, to share her emotions with him. Her thoughts turned to him with increasing frequency. She felt a growing need for his invisible presence and the comfort it gave.

She had only to spread the gossa-

mer fabric of her mind like vast butterfly wings, shimmering and iridescent with her exalted sensations, and Tom would be there, as he so often was in the moon-bathed stillness of the night. Tom, so patient, so earnest and kind, his quiet strength the foundation upon which the structure of her own being had come to rest.

But she did not reach out to him. She slumped, and the surging loveliness in her faded. Her small face turned wistful. Tom would be there—but reserved as always, somehow withdrawn from her. It was as though he kept a barrier between them, a sort of immaterial wall that made the intimacy of their mental contact an almost purely one-sided thing. It hurt and puzzled her, and the hurt had grown as Tom's importance to her had grown.

She wondered if the wall would always be there. Didn't Tom sense her disappointment and the reluctance of her own restraint?

HER eyes caught a flicker of movement across the yard, and she looked up to see Sammy and Davey walking toward her from the direction of the barn. She retreated back into her shell of caution.

Sammy had bothered her very little of late. He seemed to sense the change in her, to be aware of a greater strength and resistance. She had often noticed him watching her with a kind of wondering calculation, and it was almost entirely for his

benefit that she maintained her secrecy and watchfulness.

Only once in the past weeks had he attempted to annoy her. They had been momentarily alone in the kitchen, and Sammy had caught at her arms from behind. She had whirled and broken free with the swiftness of a wildcat, to face him with a knife snatched from the table. Sammy had gaped at her for a second or two, and then had left the kitchen without a word.

She regarded Sammy as the greatest danger, but even Davey's dim mind appeared to have grasped the change in relationships. And he had somehow seized on it to widen his break from Sammy's control. As if in defiance of his brother, Davey favored Fran with small, clumsy kindnesses, but she knew Davey could not be depended upon. His moods were mercurial, ranging from swift, hysterical excitement to long intervals of sullen gloom.

Sammy came to a stop several feet away, his pale eyes fixed on Fran and a somehow startled expression on his wizened face. The intentness of his gaze held her for an instant as she turned away to avoid him.

He blurted, "Golly, Fran, you're pretty!"

She felt a shocked dismay. Looking at herself in the stained mirror in her bedroom, she had unselfconsciously noticed a ripening and softening, and it was unpleasant to discover that Sammy had noticed it too. She caught the blurred, cloudy move-

ment of his thoughts and shuddered as she sensed the impulses from which his admiration sprang. She was only dimly sensitive to ordinary minds; there was too great a difference — a lack of harmony. For the most part she avoided the murky, alien contact. But in that instant she understood Sammy and saw his motivations in a new light.

"You tend to your chores and leave me alone!" she told him sharply, breathless and upset. She hurried away from the porch, toward the chickens in the yard, clutching the plate of scraps and crumbs she had brought with her from the kitchen.

"Aw, Fran, don't be mad," Sammy called after her, his voice cajoling and his eyes sly. "Let's be friends."

SHE indicated her contempt by remaining coldly silent. Davey giggled suddenly, and Sammy spat a curse at him and whirled to stalk into the house.

The air grew warmer and lost its dewy freshness. Big Luke returned from a horseback trip to town with an earthenware jug, his eyes bleary and lidded and his sagging face with the shine of drunkenness. He tramped heavily into the house, and a short time later Fran heard him snoring.

She busied herself with the small tasks that remained to be done before the noonday meal. She drew water from the well, and then, a

basket in one hand, set out for the barn.

The interior was shadowed and still cool, filled with the vague sounds made by the chickens. As she searched in the hay for eggs, she saw a shaft of sunlight blocked off by a movement behind her and heard a rustle of sound. She whirled startledly to discover Sammy standing a short distance away. She had been certain he was nowhere about when she started for the barn.

He made a placating gesture. "I wish you'd stop being mad at me, Fran. I don't want you to be mad at me no more." He was breathing fast. "You . . . you're nice, Fran. You're pretty . . . so pretty."

She drew back, alarm a sudden frantic drumming in her. "Keep away from me!" she spat. "Keep away from me with your lies and nasty tricks!"

"Aw, Fran" He was sidling closer.

"Keep away, Sammy! Don't you touch me!" She moved backward over a deep, uneven carpet of hay.

He followed her for a few steps, his pale eyes glittering at her and his hands splayed and tense. And then he lunged. He caught at her shoulder as she darted aside. She heard the wash-worn fabric of her dress rip and felt Sammy's arm circle her throat. Then his full weight thrust against her and she was borne down into the hay.

For a nightmare instant Sammy's breath panted against her cheek.

And then, like a wild thing, she heaved, twisted, scratched. In violent, whip-like movement, she pulled partly away, kicked out with strong, supple legs. She succeeded in thrusting Sammy aside and scrambled erect, floundering through the deep, spongy surface under her feet.

Her panicky flight took her deeper into the barn. Abruptly one foot plunged through a gap in the hay and she fell. Before she could rise again, Sammy had reached her and was pressing her back with a savage eagerness.

She knew anger, then. Hatred and disgust swept her in a wave of scalding fury, drowning all caution, all thought of hiding. The virulence in her leaped out in a blast of mental force. Sammy shrilled with pain and convulsively jerked back, and for a stunned instant he stared at her, his pale eyes bulging and his mouth loose with almost mindless fright.

A glow radiated from her. It shone from her eyes, her skin, her hair. It lay over her like a supernal cloak. She was suddenly something more than a girl, something more than human.

Sammy drew away from her in superstitious dread, trembling, his mouth working futilely. "Monster!" he gasped at last. "You . . . you're a monster! *A monster!*"

Staggering drunkenly with panic, he ran from the barn.

Fran surged erect, starkly and coldly aware of a new and greater danger. She listened for a moment to

Sammy's hoarse cries, and knew only one course lay open to her. She would have to flee. In what little time remained she would have to put as much distance between the Beckers and herself as was possible

* * *

FAR away across the rolling field she heard the baying of hounds. She whirled to a stop within a grove of trees, listening. She breathed rapidly and deeply from the steady pace she had maintained well into the afternoon. Her dress had been shredded into rag-like strips by clutching branches, and her legs and arms were scratched and bleeding.

The distant baying held a note of eagerness. The dogs unmistakably were hot on her scent. Behind them, she knew, would be men on horseback, armed and merciless. Sammy, of course, had alerted Big Luke, who in turn had rounded up a group of neighboring farmers, always hungry for sport of any kind as an escape from their drab and near-primitive existence.

She knew her lead was swiftly being cut down. A kind of instinct had taken her toward the hills, which in more pleasant times she had seen bulking darkly against the horizon and had watched with the yearning to know what lay beyond. Once they had promised adventure; now they offered refuge. In the hills she hoped to find rough ground that would make the use of horses impossible and hinder the progress of men and dogs.

Her pulses raced with the awareness of dwindling time and distance, but she delayed a moment longer. Again, as she had done twice before, she sent her mind reaching out in an urgent, pleading call.

"Tom! Tom — can't you hear me? Where are you, Tom? Why don't you answer?"

As never before, she needed the comfort of his presence, needed his help. But he was not there. He was gone — gone as though he had never been.

She was alone. And in the distance the dogs bayed eagerly, drawing nearer, always nearer.

She drew a sobbing breath and turned to resume her flight . . .

The hills towered around her in rocky grandeur. She stood on a narrow ledge and looked down a long, broken slope toward a fringe of trees. Shapes were moving there — the shapes of dogs and mounted men.

Horses were useless now, but their riders would be fresh and their guns would bring her within easy reach. She glanced despairingly at the setting sun, aware that darkness was her only hope.

A strength and endurance beyond the ordinarily human had brought her this far, a power she had never known lay in her slender limbs. Time and again it had seemed impossible that she could continue further, but always she had drawn upon some new fount of energy. But even that, she realized, had its

limit.

A faint shout mounted to her on the breeze. One of the men was gesturing upward — and she knew she had been seen. In another instant a gun sent crashing echoes through the stillness.

The muzzles of other weapons were raising toward her as she slid around a shoulder of rock and lost herself from view. She resumed her climb upward, a slender, nymph-like figure, her gold-glinting hair tumbled about her small, pale face, her dress little more than a handful of tatters.

The baying of dogs and the shouts of men followed her.

She wound her way up rocky terraces and across stretches of gravelly soil. She worked around huge masses of rock and through narrow V-shaped clefts. Once she was able to tumble a precariously balanced boulder into a passage behind her to win a slight gain of time. But the sounds of pursuit seemed always closer.

Shadows were spreading and deepening over the hills as she reached a narrow, rushing stream among the rocks. She dropped gratefully to drink, and the deliciously cold water seemed to flood her with new strength. A little more time, she thought pleadingly. Just a little more time. Soon it would be dark. And then—

The touch of the water against her face brought a flash of inspiration. If she were to walk through the stream, she might succeed in throw-

ing the dogs off the scent. She could hear them not far off, no longer so eager or so loudly vocal, but still determined.

The water was numbingly cold against her legs and stung where sharp rocks had cut the flesh. Her path lay upward and her progress was made slow and difficult by the tumbling rock surface over which the stream flowed. But a current of triumph quickened in her. Ahead lay darkness—and escape.

The rocks under her feet were smooth and slippery from the constant rush of water. She was thinking how easy it would be to fall when one foot suddenly slid from a glass-like stone. Her ankle twisted with a tearing sensation and a burst of pain, and outlines tilted crazily as she plunged sidewise into the stream.

FOR a moment she lay utterly still, paralyzed with pain and horror. It couldn't have happened, she told herself frantically. Not now of all times! But when she finally rose and tried to walk, it was to find that the ankle would not support her weight. Sick with agony from her experiment, she dragged herself to the edge of the stream and lay with her face in her arms.

It was all over, she knew. There would be no escape after all . . .

Tom, she thought, then. *Tom! I need you, Tom! Why don't you answer?*

Silence — and the baying of dogs.

Close, now, so horribly close.

"*Fran!*"

Her heart leaped incredulously. That familiar presence . . . rushing nearer across some awful gulf.

"Fran, where are you? I know what has happened, but I couldn't reach you before this. Your being discovered so suddenly forced me to complete certain preparations ahead of schedule . . . But now, Fran — think carefully. Carefully. Picture the spot where you're located, the route you took reaching it. Picture it, Fran."

She squeezed her eyes shut, concentrating, thinking over in split seconds what had taken so many hours of toil and effort, of suffering and fear. Yet even as she thought, doubt and hopelessness weighted her. How could Tom possibly reach her in time?

"It *can* be done, Fran! Our abilities include the power to send ourselves instantaneously through space — teleportation. But an objective must be clearly visualized, or supplied by the mind of another. Your thoughts made a path for me."

A voice. Not a silent mental voice — but an audible voice that ended in a soft chuckle.

Unbelieving, she looked up. She saw a figure standing beside her and knew instinctively that it was Tom. But—

It wasn't Tom. Tom was an identity, a label for someone she had never seen.

This was — Davey.

Davey! The realization exploded in her, sent alternate waves of fire and ice crashing against the walls of reason.

Davey! But a changed Davey, taller and straighter, with a firmness in his face and a brightness in his eyes that had never been present before. He was somehow majestic — god-like.

DAZEDLY she realized that Davey was different, just as she was different. Behind the outward dullness of Davey, so carefully hidden that she had not suspected it, had been the flashing intelligence she had known as Tom.

He smiled again. "Yes, Fran. I'm a little surprised that you didn't connect Tom with Davey before this. You should have remembered that Davey was two years younger than Sammy — around the same age as yourself — which meant Davey had been born after the atom raids, just as you were, and was just as likely to have been . . . changed. Maybe Davey seemed a bit too empty — and he was, in more ways than one. He was never all there mentally until now.

"You see, Fran, an important part of Davey's mind was away most of the time. He was in contact with other changed children — gathering information, making plans for the future, developing his own abilities. And he had to be careful not to let Sammy or Big Luke discover his true nature. The difference between

Davey and themselves was so great that even family ties would have meant nothing. For that reason Davey pretended to be a simple-minded too who helped Sammy in teasing you. But he wouldn't have done anything that meant actual harm."

"But why did you call yourself Tom?" Fran asked. "Why didn't you tell me you were different, too? We could have gone away — out of danger."

Davey shook his head. "You needed time to develop your full abilities, Fran, and that's done most quickly under pressure. If you knew Davey was like yourself, that pressure would be gone. There was also the chance that we might give each other away. And as for leaving, Fran, for a long time there seemed no place at all we could go to where men would not find us eventually. I and the others had to find an answer to that."

He hesitated, his gaze suddenly anxious. "It was really necessary for you to think of me as Tom, Fran. I'm sorry I had to hurt you by being secretive and on guard against you. And . . . well, I hope you're not disappointed that I turned out to be Davey."

"No," she said quickly, smiling. For whether Tom or Davey, the kindness and quiet strength, the comfort and peace she drew from them, was the same.

THE clamor of the pursuing dogs had drawn close. Now their

lithe shapes came bounding out of the deepening shadows. They splashed across the stream, leaped forward with triumphant buglings. Fangs were bared, muscles gathering for the attack.

A soft, pale light glowed from Davey. It touched the dogs, and they plunged to a stop, frozen. And then they were yelping, tumbling over each other in panic as they whirled to flee. The shadows swallowed them.

The pale light touched Fran, touched her ankle — and the pain was gone. Pain would always go like that, she knew.

"Come," Davey said. "We're going to a place that has been waiting for us, Fran — a place none of us ever thought of until a while ago. . . . Follow the pattern in my mind. Carefully, now. Carefully."

The voices of men, puzzled and angry. The footsteps of men, grating on rock, rushing nearer.

"Quick, Fran! Quick!"

A bright thread that seemed to run endlessly through an awesome darkness. The hills around her vanished, and she felt herself whirl dizzily across an unimaginable void.

Then — The city took shape around her, glowing and spectral in the dusk. She and Davey stood on a deserted street, littered with wreckage. Ruin lay everywhere, but many of the buildings still stood.

Davey said softly, "The radiation here would kill ordinary people, Fran. But it gave birth to us and is

a part of us. We of the new race draw life and not death from it. The cities are home to us, for only we can live in them. And we will live in peace, safely and without being disturbed. In the cities we will build again, more wisely and strongly than those before us."

A group of figures appeared up the street, tall boys and slender girls. They hurried forward, laughing and dancing, and their friendly welcoming thoughts reached out.

"Home . . ." Fran murmured. She drew closer to Davey and felt a deep content.

END

INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR - *Kris Neville*

(Concluded from Page 2)

this down serves to remind me of numerous things I haven't thought about for some time. I remember the day I got in a fight with a boy named John; I was eight or nine years old. I remember telling my father I'd taken up smoking; I was a sophomore in high school. And I remember talking Charlie into waiving his ten day grace period so he could go into the army the same time I did.

And more recently, after I got out of the army and was living in Pasadena, I recall drinking beer at *Sharkey's* with Gus and Nieson and Lou and Dale and O. K. Smith and God knows how many other science fiction fans while meetings were in progress at the LASFS.

And after that, I remember playing hours of bridge in the student lounge of Joplin Junior College; being sea sick on my first trip to Hawaii with the Merchant Marine;

drinking coffee at the UCLA cafeteria with Herb and Glen in preference to attending my American Lit course. . . .

And I remember selling my first story. *Super Science* bought it. I was, as you can imagine, quite elated. Until the next day, when I got back an English examination upon which the professor had noted, "You write like an illiterate." None the less, having sold a story, I kept telling myself in a wee small voice; "Well, Neville, you're a writer. *You sold a story.*"

I can't say - - after looking back over my disconnected assortment of memories - - why I decided to try to write. Perfectly normal people have come from the same environment I did. But I am sure why, after deciding to write, I write science fiction. I've been reading it for the last twelve years!

—*Kris Neville*



Conducted by Mari Wolf

IT probably won't be more than a generation or two until a cruise to Venus comes under the heading of a short trip—something to do when your vacation rolls around. When that time comes, a jaunt across the country or around the world won't be a trip at all. Maybe you'll live in California and commute to work in New York.

Science fiction? Yes, but it's far from unbelievable. Not nearly as fantastic as the thought of airplanes and superhighways would have been to our grandparents, who spent months crossing America by covered wagon.

I grew up in Laguna Beach, California, and for a while I drove to work in Santa Ana, about twenty miles away. There was nothing to it. But there are lots of oldtimers who talk of the days before Laguna was a town—when they used to build summer cabins there and drive their wagons down the canyon from Santa Ana. It took all day then, and was a journey to be looked forward

to by all the kids in the family. Up in Laguna Canyon you can still see the old well where they stopped to picnic and water their horses. And undoubtedly they got a lot more pleasure out of that daylong drive than I ever got when I hurried along what's now the canyon road.

Two months ago Rog and I came west to California. It took us three weeks. The planes that flew west from La Guardia Field the morning we left Flushing reached the west coast that same day. We could have been on one of them, but we weren't in any hurry. There were a lot of places we wanted to see along the way and a lot of people we wanted to visit. We just felt like being nomads for a while.

We left New York the day of the MacArthur parade. We'd packed the car the night before, and that morning we drove it, fully loaded, over to Hannes Bok's, and left it there while the three of us went down to Times Square. Rog and I took our last look at the city through swarms

of ticker tape and torn up newspapers and some of the six and a half million people jamming the Manhattan streets. We stood on the corner of 42nd and Broadway, waiting for the parade to come by, and while we waited we made up a science fiction story, round robin fashion. The poor heroes—Rog, Hannes, and I—got into more impossible situations than even a BEM could dream up. Darn it, I wish I could remember that plot . . .

The parade came and went, and we pushed our way through the crowds back to the subway. At Hannes' we got into our car and said goodbye and headed north, toward Albany.

WE really were nomads on that trip. We had only the front seat of the car to ourselves. In the back rode our incidental baggage—a radio, phonograph, a few dozen records, an electric coffeemaker, and our four typewriters. Oh yes, and our clothes. It was just a few days before our six months' anniversary, and we wanted to spend it in Niagara Falls.

Except for a tire that gave way just as we were stopping for a traffic light across the street from a service station, we got to the Falls without difficulty. It was early in the season and there weren't many tourists there. We wandered around the American side first, on the shore and on the islands right out in the middle of the river where it drops over the edge. It was a dizzying sensation. No matter how many pictures you see of the falls you can never really visualize them until you have stood beside them, with the spray in your face, while the rapids roar past your feet and then dive over the brink, straight down, to the rocks below. Then at night you

can watch them from the Canadian side, wreathed in their own spray, with colored searchlights playing on the walls of water.

We had a little trouble crossing to the Canadian side, though. To get there we had to go through Customs, both American and Canadian. And Rog had to explain to three different officials just why two people were traveling with four typewriters. No, we weren't trying to sell them in Canada at a profit. We were writers. If we stopped for a short while someplace we used the two portables. If we stayed longer we used the desk models. I suppose the officials thought us a bit mad, but they waved us across the border, typewriters and all.

At Detroit we reentered the United States, drove past our car's nursery—the DeSoto plant—and headed on toward Evanston and a visit with Bill Hamling and MADGE. It had been six months since we'd seen Bill and his wife, Frances, and we had a lot of things to catch up on. It was sort of hard to leave MADGE'S home grounds.

Before we went on up to Wisconsin we dropped in on OTHER WORLDS and Bea Mahaffey and had another good visit. Then north to Amherst to say hi to Ray Palmer and his family and farm and private lake. I even caught a trout up back of the mill, but it looked at me so reproachfully that I had to throw it back.

From Amherst we crossed over to St. Paul to see stf writer Charles DeVet. It was a bit hard getting there, since a couple of intervening rivers were still wandering around loose in the fields. One place we came to a Detour sign, followed the detour, and decided some fifty miles later that the highway commission had never bothered telling people

how to get off it. We had to steer by the sun until we crossed another highway, but since our detour went west we didn't much care. I wonder how far we could have followed it? Maybe to Portland . . .

Then we dropped down south to Taos, New Mexico, following a more or less direct route. We'd heard a lot about Taos and about the writers and artists who live there, and we thought we knew what we'd find. A tourist and artist colony something like Laguna Beach. But we were wrong. Taos isn't like anywhere else on earth—I'm sure of that.

Our friends there knew we were coming. The Mack Reynolds and the DeCourseys and the Fred Browns were out to meet us and take us on an enthusiastic guided tour of the town and the surrounding countryside. As I said before, it's different.

THE houses are transplanted out of the past. Their period is that of the *Conquistadores*, a blend of Spanish and Indian. Everything is made of adobe. The walls are adobe mud bricks, mudded over to form a smoother surface, usually bulging at the middle and put up without benefit of yardstick or T-square. The floors are also adobe, hardened by years of trampling and occasional wettings down with kerosene. Nothing is painted or papered or changed in any way. All the houses conform. The newest arrival in the colony builds the same mud hut as the oldest Spanish patriarch.

Taos has a curious social structure also. Its inhabitants are divided into Spanish Americans, Anglos, and tourists. The Spanish Americans are the natives, many of them direct descendants of the early Conquistadores. The Anglos are for

the most part the artists and writers who have fled civilization and returned to the comforts of a sixteenth century home. The tourists are outsiders who come to look at Taos. They are tolerated.

Just out of town is another strata of local life—the Pueblo Indians. Here, in their homes and kivas that were old when the Spaniards came, they live apart and wait for the white man to go. They are sure he will. They are independent of him. Though they drive pick-up trucks and Cadillacs, none of the white man's utilities are allowed in their pueblo. No electricity, no water system, no gas. Only the things that are detached, like portable radios and cars—things whose possession will not bring them under the domination of a way of life they consider temporary. They are very patient, waiting. Waiting for the white man to leave the towns and the roads and the fields. Waiting until the last tourist is gone and the pueblo is wholly theirs again . . .

There's a fascination about the country, but we wouldn't want to live there. Someone there told us that we liked civilization too much, that we weren't ready for Taos. I guess we'll never be ready for it, not until the houses have carpeted floors and indoor plumbing. But if that ever happens, Taos won't be Taos any more.

So we came to California. We're at Laguna now, looking out over the Pacific and the swarms of summer tourists. I don't know just how long we'll be here. Already we're looking around for a place in Arizona or Nevada or somewhere else in California. We don't know. But wherever we settle we'll keep on traveling around. We'll go out onto the northern Arizona plateau, where the landscape is a mix-

ture of Moon and Mars, or into the sequoia forests, where two thousand years is just one lifetime. And for a little while we'll almost believe that it's a generation or two later and we've taken a vacation cruise to another world.

But before we go wandering off like that, there are a few fanzines sitting here asking to be reviewed . . .

* * * * *

QUANDRY: 10c; monthly; Lee Hoffman, 101 Wagner St., Savannah, Georgia. In these days when even nickle candy bars cost a dime it's really surprising to find that ten cents can buy you so much. It does, too. Quandry is a really refreshing fanzine with a lot of chatty news and views of fandom in it.

Just about leading off the May issue is Bob Tucker's account of his life and hard times as a fanmag collector. Or, where do you put the zines when the refrigerator's full of them and they're spilling out of the bathtub?

Then there's Redd Boggs' File No. 13, whose purpose is "to discuss, reminisce, speculate, and generally gab about subjects purportedly of interest to science fiction fans." Read it and see if you don't agree that he's fulfilled this purpose very well indeed.

* * *

FANSCIENT: 50c; Spring-Summer issue combined; Donald Day, 3435 NE 38th. Ave., Portland 13, Oregon. This is Fanscient's final issue. With it ends one of the best and most professional fanzines in the field. If you've followed it in the past I know you'll feel as nostalgic as I do that it's being discontinued. If you've never read it you should certainly send for this final issue. It's one of the very best.

And be sure not to miss Hannes Bok's article; "Fantasy, Art, and Il-

lustration." It's one of the most hilarious autobiographies you'll ever read, besides thoroughly covering the three fields mentioned in its title as only Bok would cover them. Interesting sidelights, such as how you'd go about drawing a vampire to hang in your living room and scare the wits out of people, and how to draw one to sell to a magazine (two different processes.)

So long, FANSCIENT. We'll miss you . . .

* *

ORB: 20c a copy, 75c a year; quarterly; Bob Johnson, Box 941, Greeley, Colorado. This is a slick paper fanzine, beautifully bound and printed. It's a really artistic, literary fan magazine, one which must have taken a lot of time and interest to assemble and put out.

The story in the issue I have here is Betsy Curtis' "First Generation." It's a gripping story with real build-up, and even if you guess the ending way ahead of time it still hits you. A really original viewpoint.

Try ORB for fascinating fiction, poetry, and artwork. It's just what it's subtitle!—"Imaginative Fiction."

* * *

FAN-FARE: 15c a copy, 65c a year; bimonthly; W. Paul Ganley, 119 Ward Rd., N. Tonawanda, New York. You can always find some good fan fiction and poetry in Fan-Fare, and the March issue I have here is no exception. I particularly liked Andrew Duane's poem, "The Dreamers," which has a haunting mood about it. Then there's Alice Bullock's cover story, "Dormitory of the Dead," an atom spy tale with a different twist. And there are other stories by McNamar and Seller I think you'll like too.

* * *

COSMAG: 10c; bimonthly; Ian Maccauley, 57 East Park Lane, Atlanta,

Georgia. This is the fanzine of the Atlanta Science Fiction Organization. It contains a couple of gripping stories by Deaver Thomas and Jerry Burge—the latter writer having pulled off a neat piece of irony in "No Side Rockets." It's also peppered with illustrations of little hobgoblin people that I for one wouldn't mind finding on some planet, 'cause they're so good natured looking. See if you don't like them too.

* * *

FANVARIETY: 10c; bimonthly; W. Max Keasler, 420 S. 11th. St., Poplar Bluff, Missouri. The May issue has an intriguing cover. A man in armor is riding a horse, with a girl on the saddle in front of him. The man looks bored, the girl seems to be afraid he's going to fall off, but the horse is grinning from one side of his bit to the other. Maybe she feeds him sugar . . .

There are some good articles in in this issue. Redd Boggs gives well thought out tips on how to start up a letter zine, and Harry Warner passes on home highlights about yesterday's fan collectors. Nelson's cartoons, of course, are as funny as ever.

* *

EUSIFANSO: Rosco Wright, 146 E. 12th. St., Eugene, Oregon. This is the fanzine of the Eugene Science Society, and the above address is the Society's. Maybe the price is listed somewhere inside my copy, but if it is it's well hidden.

Norman Hartman, the zine's science editor, has written two technical articles that should be of interest to all stf fans. One deals with nuclear powered space-drive, including the tentative design of a ship utilizing such a nuclear drive. The other discusses the possibility of a research laboratory situated in an orbit around the earth, and its ad-

vantages for studying phenomena where vacuum or low temperature are required. Also, how such a lab could be heated by radiation.

Stapled to EUSIFANSO there's a copy of AMOEBA, Norman Hartman's own fanzine. So you see, it's two for the price of one, whatever *that* price might be.

* * *

SEETEE: 10c; monthly; Wm. Knapheide, 3046 Jackson St., San Francisco, Calif. This is the pocket-sized fanzine put out by the Tellurian Sciencefictioneers. The April-May issue contains news about Minneapolis pro writers, a poem by Knapheide called "The Cosmic Cloud," and the conclusion of Anna Sinclair's serial story.

The Tellurians are an active club, and there's a lot of correspondence between members. New members are welcome, so if you're interested in writing poetry or fiction or articles for fan publication you might look into this group.

* * *

THE IMAGINATIVE COLLECTOR combined with DAWN: 15c or 2/25c; bimonthly; Russell K. Watkins, 203 E. Wampum Ave., Louisville 9, Kentucky. This fanzine is devoted to collectors. It contains long and comprehensive book reviews, as well as reviews of magazines both past and present.

In the May issue there's an article by D. H. Keller called "The Book Collector," which gives some useful tips on how to start your own collection, as well as how others collect. If the bug has bitten you, and you've got a stack of stf mags and books in every corner, why not add this fanzine to them? You'll like it a lot.

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; twice monthly; James V. Taurasi, 137-03

32nd. Ave., Flushing, New York. The newspaper of science fiction, this is one zine no real fan should be without. It helps you keep up on the world of fandom, what's happening in sf ranks, both professional and fan. Fantasy-Times gathers news from all over the country, as well as from abroad, and it passes this news on to you with every issue. So if you want to know if a new magazine is coming out, if any editorial policy changes are coming up, what new fantasy movies are in the offing, or what's going on in the science fiction field in Europe—then you want Fantasy-Times.

* * *

TLMA 25c quarterly; Lynn Hickman, 408 W. Bell St., Statesville, North Carolina. TLMA is a brand new fanzine put out by The Little Monsters of America, whose initials it bears as its name. It's a well rounded zine, containing fiction, poetry, and articles. One of the stories, Elaine Fruchey's "God and the Grain of Sand," is really an outstanding bit of fan literature—or at least I couldn't set it down at the luncheon table.

Nancy Moore writes an article on "South America, Land of Forgotten Mysteries," an account of many of the Indian legends about the monsters who inhabit the jungles of Brazil. They're fascinating tales, though hard to track down . . . My own parents ran across them too (legends, not monsters) in their trips down into the Rain Forest on the Eastern slope of the Andes.

All in all, there's a lot of reading matter in this zine. The Little Monsters have done a fine job with their first issue.

* * *

INTERIM NEWSLETTER: free; quarterly; Julian May, 2334 N. 76th. Court, Elmwood Park, Illinois. The

Science Fiction International puts out this fanzine for the benefit of fans living outside the dollar area. Its policy is the stimulation of international correspondence and the bringing together of fans who live in countries where they have believed themselves lone enthusiasts. Each issue of the Newsletter prints names and addresses of fans in various parts of the world who are interested in active correspondence.

So if you live outside the U. S., or if you're interested in making foreign friends, write in to the Newsletter about it.

* * *

CHIMERICAL REVIEW: 15c; 942 Scribner NW, Grand Rapids Michigan. Here's a fanzine apparently without an editor, though there must be one around somewhere . . .

The April issue has two covers, the outer one being the locale of an article by a certain Rog Phillips. It's called "Writing," and you ought to read it. It gives seven useful steps for basic writing—not the advanced marketing news you find in trade journals. It's just as much for the fan who wants to try writing for the fanzines but hasn't done so yet as it is for the one who's thinking of taking it up professionally. Maybe I'm prejudiced—but I find it a very useful article indeed. Though when I try to imagine my mother on a bus with an eight armed Martian, the way Rog suggests . . .

Dennis Strong has written a story about the last artist. It's called "The Daedalian Touch," and it poses an interesting problem that may come up one of these days—what to do with artists when machines are better at creative work than men? I think you'll like that one too.

* * *

CHALLENGE: 30c; quarterly; Lil-

ith Lorraine, Rogers, Arkansas. Challenge is a poetry fanzine, and regularly prints many of the best fantasy poems in the field. In the spring issue, which will be its last, there are a number of excellent contributions by many different writers.

My favorite is Edith Ogutsch's "Pinnacle," a mood piece about the survival of an individual member of a dead race—our own. It's hauntingly written, and when you've finished it you find yourself midway between a tear and a shudder.

* * *

FANTASY ADVERTISER: 15c; bi-monthly; 1745 Kerneth Road, Glendale 1, Calif. In lots of ways Fantasy Advertiser isn't a fanzine at all. It's what it says it is—The Science Fiction Bookman's Journal. In every issue there are reviews of the new books in the field. Also, a good portion is given to advertising, both by booksellers dealing with large quantities of material and by fans who have a copy or two of a rare edition they want to sell. If you're in the market for hard to get stf items, you'll probably find them listed here.

* * *

HYSTERIA: I can't resist reviewing this one-shot, put out by Dennis Strong and John Kalas, the editors of Chimerical Review . . . Oh-ho, so the lost editors did turn up. Well, well . . . Anyway, I can't help reviewing it 'cause it's dedicated to Mrs. Rog Phillips. Me! First thing ever dedicated to me, too.

One-shots, you know, are fanzines, put out just once, for the fun of it, and circulated among the editor's friends and regular mailing list. This fanzine is even more, though. Through the lower right hand corner there is a small hole—the one shot.

Another twist is that half of the editorial is left blank so that every fan can be his own editor and write in what he wants to read about . . .

Maybe if you write in for Chimerical Review, you can get one of these Hysterical ones too.

* * *

Well, finally I'm at the bottom of the Box. Lots of fanzines this time. Keep 'em coming—I sure get a kick out of sitting here reading them. Just send them to me at P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill.

—MARI WOLF

DON'T MISS THE GREAT MARCH ISSUE!

DWIGHT V. SWAIN

RETURNS WITH A TERRIFIC NEW NOVEL:—

DARK DESTINY!

You applauded Dwight V. Swain's recent novel, CRY CHAOS! You asked us to hold on to Swain—and we have! Writing exclusively for IMAGINATION, Dwight has turned out one of the fastest, suspense-packed science fiction novels we've read in many years. This is the story of one man's battle against a peril so great it makes the atom bomb look like a child's toy! You'll travel to an alien world and meet a beautiful and evil goddess who has slept for a thousand years, but now—we can't say anything more. Reserve your copy of the big March issue at your newsstand now. It will go on sale promptly, the first week in January. Or better yet—

TURN TO PAGE 162 FOR A SENSATIONAL ANNOUNCEMENT!

Letters From The Readers

(Continued from Page 123)

like to write, but can't, so I do the next best thing—read them.

Mrs. G. L. "Pat" Dawson
727 E. Mason St.
Owosso, Mich.

You hear that, Edd? Got time to fit some of Madge's work into your schedule? . . . wh

THAT ISSUE SOLD HIM

Dear Mr. Hamling:

On the basis of your September issue of IMAGINATION I'm sending you my subscription.

I liked all of the stories although I thought the novel was a little weak in spots. I liked THE MISTAKE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS. I thought it was pretty clever. HOLD BACK TOMORROW was really to my liking. FANTASY FILM FLASHES overwhelmed me with the extensiveness of science & fantasy in the films.

Also I want to compliment you and your artist on the striking cover. May your magazine maintain its standards in quality. I like it very much.

David Warfield
5223 Catalina
Kansas City, Mo.

Thanks for the nice words, Dave, and we'll do our best to make each issue even better . . . wh

LUDWIG RANG THE NO. 1 BELL

Dear Ed:

THE MISTAKE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS in the September Madge is one of the best stories

I've read in many years. Enjoyed it immensely. And the cover is the only good one you've had so far. It is excellent. Space ships for stf magazines will be my choice every time.

I'd like to see more stories by Edward Ludwig. His story INHERITANCE, in the 1st issue is the finest one up to date.

Eva Firestone
Upton, Wyoming

We've got some great space ship covers coming up — and one in particular that is the most terrific thing you — or we — have ever seen. More about it later . . . wh

WATCH THE SUB-HEADS

Dear wh:

You are doing a fine job with IMAGINATION. I have been reading science fiction since 1929 so I ought to know!

But, for heaven's sake, stop putting the punch line in the blurbs!

Orin T. Lewis
237 E. 10th

Long Beach, Cal.

Which blurbs did you have in mind? We try and not give the story away and still give a teaser . . . wh

HOORAY FOR EVERYBODY!

Dear wh:

After a short absence from reading stf magazines I came across your new charge, IMAGINATION.

As is usual with me, I first read the letter section. I thought that the raves must be paid ads, I just couldn't believe them. But when I

read the stories, FANDORA'S BOX, and the rest of Madge, I could see they were 100% right!

I am a fan of yours from your days as editor of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, and I must say you didn't disappoint me with your new magazine. I find in it what is so sorely lacking in others, variety. As examples, I had a good laugh when I came to THE MISTAKE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, a violent shudder when I read CRY CHAOS!, and a bit of mystery, a tingling of my own curiosity in THE ANSWER. Do you see what I mean?

The cover? Well, all I can say is, hooray for Hinton! I liked the interiors because they were the type of illo suited to the type of story at all times. So I say hooray for the artists!

In short, hooray for Madge!

G. M. Pavlik
19486 Packard Ave.
Detroit, 34, Mich.

Hooray for you too! . . . wh

JOINING THE TUMULT

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Admittedly, this is my first letter to IMAGINATION, as I do not write to the pros much, but I decided I had to add my congratulations to the tumult. In my estimation, IMAGINATION has improved more since you've taken the reins than any other magazine in proportionate time. Needless to say, if you keep up the improvements at the present rate, I feel safe in predicting that Madge will soon hit the very top. No one can argue that the present format isn't the best type, and with the stories constantly improving, well . . .

I would like to see the fanzine section enlarged. STARTLING STORIES has the best so far. Also, I'd like to see some good old fashioned

fantasy of the werewolf, vampire, poltergeist type. Why not get Geoff (Bob Krepps) St. Reynard to work on a few?

In the September issue I put I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS at the top of the list. CRY CHAOS! was good but I couldn't help thinking of it as a space opera. THE MISTAKE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS was the best little piece of crud I've read in quite a while.

FANTASY FILM FLASHES was nice. The theater I work at showed THE THING recently. The whole week we were fully packed, so people liked it.

In the event this is published I'd like to mention Lynn Hickman's club, THE LITTLE MONSTERS OF AMERICA, so called because when you try to sneak away from a newsstand with a nude or BEM on the cover everybody stares at you as though you were a little monster. For membership write Lynn Hickman, 408 W. Bell St., Statesville, N. C. The club-zine, TLMA will be a pleasant surprise.

Bobby Pope
SW Hill & Hanover Sts.
Charleston, S. C.

We'll tell Geoff to start thinking about some nice fantasy stories. He's done some nice ones in the past . wh

FOR CONNECTICUT FANS

Dear Ed:

Could any of your readers tell me where I can get in touch with a fan club in Connecticut? Or else the nearest one to it. Thanks.

John Ring
301 Central Ave.
Norwich, Conn.

A WORD FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Dear Ed:

In your June issue you comment-

ed on DESTINATION MOON. I cannot agree with you that the audience laughter was due to there being no story or a lack of sympathy with the problems of the characters. The plot was satisfactory, and as to the characters, it was a pleasure to find a few people who were not trying to double-cross each other.

The story was that of the first trip to the Moon and was handled with commendable restraint. As for the laughter, it is a well known fact that the general public is not educated to the idea of space travel. It is still Buck Rogers stuff to them. They neither understand it nor appreciate it as yet.

DM was not without fault, but its flaws were far out-weighed by its excellent handling of the subject. Many of my friends who consider me quite crazy for reading lurid-covered pulps, spoke highly of the film and agree it was well done and that it made a trip to the moon seem plausible, which was, I think, the main object of the film.

Pearle Appleford
75 Kensington Drive
Durban North
Durban, Natal
South Africa

Thanks for the comments, Pearle, and welcome into the fold. We've heard from quite a few countries this issue and it's nice to know that our friends in other lands think enough of us to write in. Let us hear from you again. . . . with

A CANADIAN QUANDRY

Dear Ed:

I'm a very avid reader of stf and as such I'm faced with a peculiar problem that perhaps others as well as myself have had to face. Could either you or any others of the wonderful, science fiction brotherhood

help me out?

As yet in this section of the country, stf fan clubs and otherwise general interest in this type of literature are non-existent, the nearest I can think of being in Vancouver, almost 200 miles away. Now here's my problem: Many of the people I know (my family included) look upon stf as "Oh . . . that stuff!" and are most insistent in classifying it as low grade reading. When I buy the magazines (yours too) at the various newsstands the clerks invariably give me an "Are you sure you have the right magazine?" look. I can never bring up the topic of science fiction anywhere without receiving a glance that makes me feel like a different species of the human race.

Now you know, and I know that science fiction is one of the best things that could have happened to the world. Okay, but what can be done about so many of these stoic and stubborn people who apparently cannot and seemingly will not believe that there could be races on distant planets that can be thrilled by music and art and joy and wonder, the same as us. It's a problem I can't beat, and yet I don't always want to be sneaking to some secluded spot to read science fiction. I wholeheartedly invite anybody anywhere to write to me so that maybe I can find some friends who feel the same way I do.

By the way, Mr. Hamling, just for the record I class IMAGINATION in the big three of science fiction.

Larry G. Slapak
P. O. Box 83
Armstrong, B. C.,
Canada

The next time somebody asks you why you read science fiction just look them steadily in the eye and inquire in your most surprised manner, "You mean to say YOU don't

read the most modern form of literature?" Put the shoe on the other foot for it's the nose-looker-downer who's behind the times. Pity the poor devils. . . . wh

SOUTH AMERICA CHECKS IN

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I have been reading your excellent magazine, IMAGINATION since its first issue and feel that praise and criticism are both due. Let me start with the bouquets first. I like your format; I like your stories; I like the spirit in which the magazine is managed. Now the brickbats. I do not like the way the cover is fixed to the magazine. It comes off too easily despite the greatest care. I do not like too many reader's letters. There were 14½ pages in the last issue I read. And by the way, why is the 6th issue dated September instead of August? We lost a month someplace . . .

I hope you continue to keep IMAGINATION on its present trend, a mixture of off-trail, fantastic and science tales. I also hope you will not start using serials.

One last question before I close. Can we get rid of the boxes and story titles on the cover illustration? To me they seem so disfiguring . . . All best wishes.

N. N. Tereshchenko
Public Hospital
Georgetown
British Guiana
South America

We apologize for the binding you mention. Our printer has had difficulty in solving the technical processes necessary to overcome the fault; however we believe the issues you now receive are much better, don't you?

You say you don't like letter sections being long? That's interesting

since most readers prefer a big department. As to the cover titles, we can't think of a way to eliminate them and still give feature presentation to the cover story in each issue. We try and take as little space as possible, you will note, especially on recent issues. And thanks for writing us. And by all means let's hear from you again. . . . wh

FROM WIESBADEN, GERMANY

Dear Ed:

Being somewhat of a newcomer to stf I've nevertheless taken to it in a big way during the past two years. As you may know, someone took a poll not too long ago of the servicemen's reading preference and science fiction rated very high on the list.

Luckily someone tipped me off about Madge early enough to start with the first issue in 1950 and I've never been disappointed yet.

Give us more by Bloch, Bradbury, Myers and Annas. By the last two I mean that a little humor helps to round out a good magazine. Personally I got a kick out of Len Zitts and his crazy antics, and not to forget TOFFEE and her madcap escapades.

You'd be surprised at the number of German people over here who enjoy science fiction and fantasy. My issues of Madge go from hand to hand and there are very few complaints from its readers. It seems that much of the current popularity in stf has sprung up since my departure from the States back in '48, so I'll have to catch up (at long last) when I return to the west coast.

Getting back to Madge, your current issues are good, and the series on authors is too, but how about including their pen-names along with their biographies. Has anybody

ever made up a list of pen-names?

One last question before closing: would flaming meteors be passing the rocket in outer space on the September cover? Assuming of course that the purple band surrounding the Earth is atmosphere. Is that what you meant in your editorial about "stretching a point here or there for purposes of dramatic composition"?

Well, to sum up everything, Mr. Hamling, I'm sold on IMAGINATION, and come what may, as long as it's published I'll buy it.

Cpl. Johnny Christensen
Hq 1807th AACs Wing

APO 633, c/o PM,
New York, N. Y.

*You hit it on the head, Johnny.
That's what we meant about the
cover. with*

WORD FROM ENGLAND

Dear Ed:

Although I have read and enjoyed many issues of your excellent magazine and have often felt the urge to write an appreciative letter to you and your staff, it was only this evening that I decided that a letter from a foreigner might by some freak of fate work its way into your reader's page.

First of all I must beg of you to maintain your present standard of production because it is in almost every way, tops, in its own field. I have only one gripe. American magazines are widely read over here, and while we appreciate that "Americaneese" is a faster and snappier dialogue, the locale is invariably yankee-land wherever the action is carried out on Terra.

As you probably know, American sf mags captured the lead in popularity in Britain many years ago, and, in my opinion still maintain that lead here. Part of this is be-

cause our publishers can't get the material necessary to compete with your mags and those we do put out are inferior for technical reasons. And now a lack of dollars has curtailed import of American magazines so that leaves us fans over here starved for good reading.

Which brings me to an appeal. In the last two months, I and a number of other fans have attempted to form a s-f club. At the time of writing I am pleased to say that members are flocking thick and fast. Our objects are: 1. The furtherance of opinion and data for space travel; 2. The swapping of all kinds of sf literature; 3. The compilation of a fan list for the use of all members in an effort to increase their contact with others; 4. A sincere desire to get in touch with American fans, and all other countries as well.

Thus, the appeal to you to publish this in your magazine directed at American fan clubs. We need help in the matter of organization, procedure, etc. If some of your American fan clubs would write us we would be very grateful. Many of our members feel we are a neglected class of British social life and we look to America, the birthplace of science fiction, for guidance.

L. W. Nowlan

Chairman

BRITISH S/F
ASSOCIATION

11 Turton House

Barfield Gardens

Plumstead, London, S. E. 18

England

*We're more than happy to publish
your letter and we sincerely hope
that quite a number of American
fan groups will answer you. As to
the locale in stories, we'll bet you
were pleased with Geoff St. Reyn-
ard's novel last issue with England
as the background. with*

RE GOOD AND BAD STF

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I first became acquainted with science fiction & fantasy when I picked up a copy of GALAXY last November. Since then I have read a great deal in the sf-fantasy field. I spotted IMAGINATION about a week ago, and as you can see from the subscription enclosed, I enjoyed the September issue very much. I must say however, that your stories do not measure up to GALAXY'S standards. Your "Letters" column and FANDORA'S BOX are, on the other hand, capable of beating anything similar in GALAXY. One question: why is it that GALAXY, as new to the stf field as is IMAGINATION, has become the science fiction magazine? It seems to me that other prozines such as Madge and OTHER WORLDS could measure up to GALAXY'S quality very easily if they demanded a little more from the writers—that extra Martian or so that really makes a fan sit up and take notice.

Discussing the September issue, I agree with you that THE THING is a great movie—really science fiction as contrasted to DESTINATION MOON. I suppose other readers will disagree with me violently, but I thought WE'RE OFF TO MARS! was the best story in the issue. Next comes I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS, CRY CHAOS!, THE ANSWER, HOLD BACK TOMORROW, and finally THE MIS-TAKE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS. Almost all the illos were good and the cover was excellent.

I would now like to sound off on something I think is becoming increasingly important in the science fiction field. Science fiction (I am including science-fantasy and pure fantasy in this) can be good and bad. I believe

there are two branches of stf, stemming from the traditions of Wells, Poe, Verne, and others, and one stemming from a hodgepodge which has produced "Buck Rogers" and the comic book variety. I believe it is your duty, Mr. Hamling, as editor of IMAGINATION, and the duty of every other editor to present to your readers, a great many of whom are young and impressionable, the differences in good and bad science fiction. I read a comment in another prozine about stf becoming a truly "accepted" fiction. To date I do not believe it is. With your help, however, science fiction need not stay in the "fandom" class it is now; one of the important ways to reach this "accepted" goal is to impress youngsters with the fact that they may gain a wealth of knowledge through reading good science fiction, not stories which are regarded by many parents as "trash".

I hope you will publish this letter and other letters you may receive on the subject. In addition, I would like to receive letters from any and all fans and readers, especially from New England, commenting on my ideas and discussing their own. I would also like to hear from anyone in Massachusetts interested in starting a club, or information as to where in Massachusetts I can join one.

Bob Gagne
5 Kensington St.
Andover, Mass.

Your question as to why Galaxy seems to be "the" magazine is an interesting one to answer. It seems we have to define just who considers any particular magazine the top one. If you mean the fans (organized fan groups) then it is true you could call it "the" magazine. If you mean top magazine from the standpoint of circulation throughout the country, then it is not, to the best of our

knowledge. *AMAZING STORIES*, as far as we have been able to determine, has been the largest consistently selling sf magazine for a number of years. We do not say this because we were managing editor of that magazine and *FA* before taking over *Madge*, but because it is a fact. As far as we know, in recent years no magazine in the field has had as high a circulation as *AMAZING*. We doff our editorial hat to the old Aristocrat of science fiction for this consistent leadership. But at the same time we'd like to have you and the rest of our readers know that *IMAGINATION* is growing with every issue. You've heard the old phrase, "Move over boys . . ." Well, that's us coming up!

As to good and bad science fiction we may have covered th's subject in our November editorial. At any rate you can be assured that *Madge* will try and publish only good stories for everybody's entertainment. . . wth

OUCH, THAT HURT!

Gentlemen:

At a cost of 10c more than the usual run of science and fantasy fiction pulps, one would expect stories of a better quality.

Permit me to render an opinion on the contents of your September issue, Volume 2, Number 4.

TRIPE.

Harry B. Sorensen
230 North L St.
Tulare, Cal.

We don't mind intelligent criticism, Harry, in fact we encourage it and if the case warrants, often make necessary changes. But we don't like to be criticized without specific reasons. You say we charge 10c more for *Madge* than the usual run of sf pulps. In our digest field *ASTOUNDING*, *GALAXY*, *MAGA-*

ZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, *OTHER WORLDS* (and others we can't think of at the moment) all charge the same cover price, 35c. Is this the "usual run" you speak of?

As to your opinion of the September issue we'd be more than happy to have you discuss it intelligently. *Tripe* is a potent word but it doesn't say anything specific. . . wth

WORKING TO THE TOP

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I've never written to any editor before, but I've suddenly got a craving to. As soon as I got the September issue of *Madge* I sat down and started reading. During my spare time I have finished every story in the book except *CRY CHAOS!* Here's how I rate them: *THE ANSWER*, not too interesting—it lacked something. *HOLD' BACK TOMORROW* didn't live up to Neville's usual standard. *MASTER RACE*, congratulate Richard Ashby on this fine story. It has a neat plot. Any visitor from the void would be afraid after looking at some of the horrors in comic books! *I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS* was in my mind the best story. I have nothing to say about *MIS-TAKE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS* except that I agree with what you said in the editorial. *WE'RE OFF TO MARS* was very good. Wasn't *MEET ME IN TOMORROW* in the December, 1950 issue somewhat like it?

The artwork wasn't too bad. Pretty good. The cover was great! *Madge* is worth 2nd place to me, but if she keeps up the way she is doing now she'll soon rate 1st place. Last, but not least, are there any fan clubs in the Philadelphia area? If so how can I get in touch with them?

Martin Hauser

6640 N. 16th St.

Philadelphia 26, Pa.

We'll bet the Phillie fans write you pretty soon, Martin. . . . wkh

HIS FIRST STF MAGAZINE!

Dear Ed:

Although Edgar Rice Burroughs is my favorite science fiction author, I decided to try a s-f magazine. I spotted your September cover right away, and as this is my first s-f magazine, perhaps I can't judge it too well. But all I can say is that if all your IMAGINATIONS are as good as this one you've found a steady reader!

As for serials, it seems to me that a person who buys a magazine to read complete stories will be disappointed if he has to wait a month or two to read further. It also seems too bad you don't run some of Edgar Rice Burroughs s-f stories. But as there is more sword - play than para-ray fights, I doubt if you will.

Paul Garrison

Muskingum Drive

Marietta, Ohio

Welcome into the fold, Paul, and we're sure you'll like future issues of Madge even better. As to the Burroughs stories, the great master has passed on and we don't know of any other stories of his that have not already seen publication. . . . wkh

CONCERNING FANDOM . . .

AND THINGS

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Among other things, it was the September issue of IMAGINATION that set this letter rolling.

In the letter section you sounded off against reprint magazines. I am simply going to reiterate what another fan said in OTHER

WORLDS. You publishing fellows don't give a damn whether we want something reprinted or whether we enjoy something or not. All you're interested in is making a few lousy bucks. This is not fair to people who are paying the freight, and that's us readers.

After the April issue I almost didn't buy the mag again. Disgusting stories like DRINK MY RED BLOOD proved to me how hacky a magazine can get. FEARFUL FOREST had been done a million times before. Not even Bradbury was good.

But, at the last moment, I bought the June issue. It too was slightly ho-hum. Bloch's novel saved the day. Then I bought the September issue. The stories were wonderful! Enough said. . .

I liked your editorial too. But I warn you not to go monthly. It will be just like relatives; after the first few days they stink.

As to the forecast for November, don't bore us with St. Reynard again.

A word to Mari Wolf and FANDORA'S BOX: With all your pushing for fandom you don't know the half of it. You (like most magazine editors) burst forth with ecstatic screams of delight about fandom. You say "plan to make it" to the Conventions. Here is my main complaint about the whole thing. You've got to be a millionaire to go to such affairs. Like thousands of average fans I would give my right arm for some old mags or an original illustration from a story. But like all the unknowns I can't bid against big fan combos and moneybags who can afford to go as high as is necessary.

Also, how do you account for this: There are thousands of active fans but there are also triple this amount of people who read stf avidly, yet know not one fan or author. How

do they feel when Ackerman and others chant in readers columns etc., about the fun they had. Us unknowns wonder if these people even bother to invite non-active fans to come. Of course they say, come one, come all; this is like going to a milkmen's convention and not being a known milkman. It's confusing. Why don't the convention heads offer to introduce the non-active fans around? I think a lot more of us would come running.

This letter merely hopes for a more stronger fandom than the few who command the heap now. There are thousands of future leaders who are reluctant to enter into such a crazy deal. What they see are scrablblings of people arguing the most ridiculous things. When the pot-pourri of hoaxes such as Shaverism and Dianetics are sensibly laid aside maybe the log book of fandom will grow and grow.

As conditions are now I'm not expecting too much. Since the more intelligent magazines (such as SS & TWS) rarely give such ravings more than a casual glance, I think other publications who try to sell copies through such things ought to take notice.

While I've yet to see a fan I really believe that sfans are the happiest people on Earth. They get a lot of fun in knocking each other and things in general and are the most unbiased of the human race.

Good luck to your improving magazine.

Philip Brantingham
1517 Lincoln Ave.
Calumet City, Ill.

Concerning reprints, Philip, we think you're forgetting some of the things we said. We admit we don't like them from a business standpoint as it costs a lot more editorially to produce a magazine like Madge than it

does a reprint. (And along those lines, if all we were interested in was a few lousy bucks, as you put it, then we would certainly not be buying new stories when we could get cheaper reprints.) We also do not feel that our readers are being ignored in their wants. We stated that we felt reprints should be confined to anthologies and hard cover novels. There are plenty of them available, certainly enough to satisfy the desire for reprint stories. Reprint stories in magazines are just another effort to cut the budget and make a few extra dollars while other magazines like Madge try and present the best of new material, and pay for it. Sure our readers pay the freight, and we'll do our best to make each shipment better than the previous one. Fair enough?

As to fandom, we'll let Mari Wolf answer your letter next issue. All we say is that the next convention, this year, will be held in Chicago. (Dates and details to be announced later.) Every reader will be cordially invited to attend, and your editor personally promises it will be a great pleasure to introduce everyone around. As to original illos, tell you what. Look through this issue and pick out which one you want. We'll send you the original when you write us. OK? . . . with

A FIEND INDEED!

Dear Ed:

When I took up science fiction & fantasy two years ago I never thought I would become a fiend over it. But now, here I am!

In the September issue, CRY CHAOS! and MASTER RACE tie for first place. Give Jules Archer a feather in his hat for the very humorous MISTAKE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS. Finishing third is WE'RE OFF TO MARS!

By the way, do you know where I can get a science fiction dictionary?

I enjoy FANDORA'S BOX very much and only wish there were more of it in each issue. As to serials, I vote against them, definitely.

In closing, do you know of any fan club close to Pine Bluff?

Grady Zimmerman
2000 West 18th
Pine Bluff, Ark.

We understand a science fiction dictionary is in process of being made, but we have no concrete details to offer at this time. When we hear more we'll announce it. The fans in your area will no doubt answer your last question. . . . wkh

CONGRATS TO HINTON

Dear Bill:

Congratulations to Walter Hinton! His painting on the September cover illustrating CRY CHAOS! was excellent as well as true to the events in the story.

I like the cartoons and want to see more of them. The one in the September issue was amusing.

Now for a word about the stories. CRY CHAOS! is an excellent story. After there had been a few interruptions I finally finished it. Congratulations to Dwight V. Swain!

THE ANSWER is fair as far as the plot and the writing are concerned. HOLD BACK TOMORROW is also a fair story. MASTER RACE was written cleverly. I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS and THE MISTAKE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS were excellent humor pieces. WE'RE OFF TO MARS was a good story.

Concerning serials, it may be a good idea when Madge goes monthly and we don't have to wait so long for another part between issues.

Wilbur Hunt

417 6th Ave.
Palmetto, Fla.

Glad you liked the interplanetary cover. As a sort of preview, we'll hint just a little bit at a future cover—it will be the most sensational interplanetary cover you have ever seen. Now we've seen hundreds and we're not making an idle boast. We can't say anything else right now as that would give the secret away, so just wait for the big announcement soon. . . . wkh

ONE OF THE TOP FIVE!

Dear Bill:

With the September issue Madge has been firmly established as one of the top five stf magazines. Before you sniff at this let me remind you that there are around thirty to choose from! You will have to be constantly on the upgrade to remain there.

I believe you have made definite progress with your covers. Those dye-prints by Malcolm Smith are fine and seem particularly appropriate for Madge. They seem to reproduce better too. The new type faces you are using on the departments are really eye-catching. I am surprised that we got them so soon after asking for them.

It looks like Madge can add a publishing coup to its list of other achievements. I am talking about Dwight V. Swain, of course. His CRY CHAOS! ranks right up there with the best of them. I'll be looking forward to his DARK DESTINY soon. If it's anywhere as good as CRY CHAOS! I'll be satisfied.

How about some yarns by some of the lesser known writers such as Lesser, DeVet, Annas, and say, how about that Joe named Hamling? Seems as if I recall him writing some pretty good stuff through the years.

Ackerman's FANTASY FILM FLASHES was surprisingly informative. I had no idea so many films were either being produced or were under consideration. I just hope that Hollywood doesn't burn itself out in one big blast.

Mari Wolf's column, as always, is well worth reading. However, I think she should devote more space to actual fanzine review.

Now to the "battlefield" known as the Reader's department. For the love of everyone above the age of five, please keep childish arguments on "Dianetics" out of Madge.

Your reply to Tom Reamy's letter was both interesting and heartening. I am happy to learn that you don't retain all rights to a story. That gives the authors a break.

The blast you gave *Los Cuentos Fantasticos* was never more well deserved. A cheap, lazy, inferior fly-by-night Mexican outfit and nothing more. This sort of publication certainly doesn't help relations between our two countries.

Jan Romanoff
26601 S. Western
Apt. 341
Lomita, Cal.

We're glad you put Madge right at the top of the pile, Jan, because in all sincerity we feel the magazine belongs there. We're not making any great staggering blustos about how good we are, we just feel that the stories, cover, illos, and general atmosphere of Madge speak for themselves. What goes into a magazine is what makes it, and we're doing our best to put only the best stories obtainable in Madge, and that goes for the covers etc., as well. As to your suggestions about lesser known authors, we have some material by Lesser coming up next issue! As to the others you mention we'll see what can be done. . . wh

ZOUNDS & GADZOOKS!

Dear Bill:

How does Madge do it? Most sf magazines stop getting better and better after a certain success has been reached, but not Madge! Zounds and gadzooks and more power to you!

The September cover was sensational. More of Hinton. It was really a swell job.

CRY CHAOS! was far and away the best of the stories even better than BEYOND THE FEARFUL FOREST which I thought was tops back in the April number.

Second best was HOLD BACK TOMORROW. Neville never gave any hint of the surprising ending which was the high point of the story.

Next came WE'RE OFF TO MARS!, MASTER RACE, I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS, THE ANSWER, and THE MISTAKE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.

Best inside illo was the one for THE ANSWER, with the one for CRY CHAOS! a close second.

Hurry up and make Madge a monthly publication. And no serials . . .

I would like to correspond with other fans. Anybody care to drop me a line?

Jerry Symmonds
Box 150
Lockwood, Mo.

How do we do it, Jerry? We simply try and buy the best stories in the market for Madge. And by gosh we think we've got them too! Just wait until you read some of the future issues if you think the current ones were good. . . . wh

SHADES OF THE OLD WEST!

Dear Editor:

I just had to write and say how bad I thought CRY CHAOS! was. The plot is older than the hills—I've read it with various heroes and locales. Roy Rogers and his contemporaries in the Old West, settlers both before and after the revolution, and fighting missionaries in China, Africa, Alaska, etc. Of course, the *Chonyas* and *Malys* in these stories were Indians or natives . . .

The only claim CRY CHAOS! had to science fiction was its interplanetary background and plentiful use of new words like *gar*, *chitza*, *sha*, *tara*, and *dau*. On one page I found 11 words in italics, on another, 12. Pretty weak connections, I'd say.

Of the 7 stories in the September issue I thought only 2 were worth printing—HOLD BACK TOMORROW and THE MISTAKE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS. It's funny, I usually like Madge a lot. Don't pull these issues on us often, please!

Oh yes, just in case this letter sees print, hello to Dick, Andy, George, and Dennis. (Hafta keep my penpals happy!)

Judy Sanow
142½ S. Sycamore Ave.
Los Angeles 36, Cal.

Cuss it all, Miss Judy, we feel downright hurt that us rangeriders ain't got no place a'tall in this here interplanetary roundup. Heck now, you mean'ta tell us gun-slingin' cowpokes there ain't gonna be no rustlers, claim jumpers, and tinhorn gamblers on Mars and Venus when them spreads are homesteaded? And we'll bet there'll be many a padre sent up there to preach the Good Book to the natives—and a lot 'o trouble as a result. And you know darn well those big interplanetary freight companies are gonna give the settlers trouble just like we had with the railroads. As to the new

lingo tossed around up on them there planets, well we kinda savvy them as meanin' good guys and bad guys. Us cowpokes and ranchers may be kinda old stuff on Earth right now, but we'll be ridin' the star-trails one of these days. You wait and see.

... Ed.

I LIKE IT—I LI-I-I-KE IT!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I'll start off by saying, "get more Swain!" The June issue was my introduction to Madge and it left me cold, but I was interested in what Swain was like, being an old Burroughs fan. Well I went down to the newsstand one day and lo-and-behold the first thing that hit me was that bee-u-tiful painting by Hinton. All I can say is get him to do the covers more often; that boy is as good at painting as Swain is at writing.

Although the shorts were too short, and too weak, your novel more than made up for it.

Say, if any of you Burroughs fans would like to get rid of any of the old out of print Burroughs books or magazines with his stories, I am willing to pay a fair — but not unreasonable — price. I vote yes for serials, and have the first one by Swain, Bloch, Anderson, or Shaver.

W. A. Peck
1041 W. Agarita Ave.
San Antonio 1, Texas

Swain has the feature novel next issue, *DARK DESTINY*. It's really a fine, action-packed story that will thrill you every minute. And Dwight will have many other stories in future issues too. He's the best thing that's happened to science fiction this year—or any other year! We're mighty proud to have brought him back to the fold. . . . wh

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Editor, William L. Hamling ----- 1426 Fowler Ave., Evanston, Illinois
Managing editor, None.
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WILLIAM L. HAMLING, Editor.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 7th day of September, 1951.

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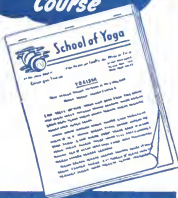
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